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TOTALING $4,000

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1. Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine offers a cash award of $2,000 as First Prize for the best original detective or crime short story. In addition, EQMM will award five (5) Second Prizes of $500 each, and five (5) Third Prizes of $300 each. All prizes include publication rights in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, subject to the provisions of paragraph 7. Other acceptable stories will be purchased at EQMM's regular rates.

2. Preferably, stories should not exceed 10,000 words.

3. Awards will be made solely on the basis of merit — that is, quality of writing and originality of plot. The contest is open to everyone except employees of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, The American Mercury, Inc., and their families. Stories are solicited from amateur as well as professional writers; from beginners as well as old-timers. All will have an equal chance to win the prizes.

4. The judges who will make the final decision in the contest will be Ellery Queen and the editorial staff of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.

5. All entries must be received at the office of the magazine, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y., not later than October 20, 1949.

6. Prize winners will be announced and the prizes awarded by Christmas 1949. The prize-winning stories will appear in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine during 1950.

7. All prize winners and all other contestants whose stories are purchased agree to grant Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine first book-anthology rights, and when these rights are exercised, they will be paid for as follows: $35 for the original edition, $25 for reprint editions, $25 for British book anthology rights, and a pro rata share of 25% of the royalties if the anthology should be chosen by a book club. Authors of all stories bought through this contest agree to sell non-exclusive foreign rights for $35 per story.

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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WINNER OF A THIRD PRIZE: NICHOLAS BLAKE

"Nicholas Blake" is the pseudonym used for detective-story writing by one of England's foremost poets — Cecil Day Lewis. It is a well-known economic law that poetry seldom earns its fashioner a living. Mr. Day Lewis originally attacked the Coast of Criminalia to make money — indeed, his first objective was to pay for repairing a leaking roof!

Nicholas Blake was born in Ireland in 1904. On his mother's side he is related to Oliver Goldsmith, and through his paternal grandmother to W. B. Yeats. It is no wonder that the descendant of two such distinguished lines should start writing serious verse at the age of six, and that at Oxford he was one of the group, with W. H. Auden and Stephen Spender, who launched the "new" poetry of the 1930s.

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Put on your deerstalker, light up a Régie cigarette, or munch cheese cake — whatever your particular private-eye pleasure — and we'll have another 'tec tryst just before the solution . . .

A STUDY IN WHITE

by NICHOLAS BLAKE

"SEASONABLE weather for the time of year," remarked the Expansive Man in a voice succulent as the breast of a roast goose.

The Deep Chap, sitting next to him in the railway compartment, glanced out at the snow, swarming and swirling past the window-pane. He replied: "You really like it? Oh, well, it's an ill blizzard that blows nobody no good. Depends what you mean by seasonable, though. Statistics for the last fifty years would show ——"

"Name of Joad, sir?" asked the Expansive Man, treating the compartment to a wholesale wink.

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"No, Stansfield, Henry Stansfield." The Deep Chap, a ruddy-faced man who sat with hands firmly planted on the knees of his brown tweed suit, might have been a prosperous farmer but for the long, steady, meditative scrutiny which he now bent upon each of his fellow-travelers in turn.

What he saw was not particularly rewarding. On the opposite seat, from left to right, were a Forward Piece, who had taken the Expansive Man's wink wholly to herself and contrived to wriggle her tight skirt farther up from her knee; a dessicated, sandy, lawyerish little man who fumed and fussed like an angry kettle, consulting every five minutes his gold watch, then shaking out his *Times* with the crackle of a legal parchment; and a Flash Card, dressed up to the nines of spivdom, with the bold yet uneasy stare of the young delinquent.

"Mine's Percy Dukes," said the Expansive Man. "P.D. to my friends. General Dealer. At your service. Well, we'll be across the border in an hour and a half, and then hey for the bluebells of bonny Scotland!"

"Bluebells in January? You're hopeful," remarked the Forward Piece.

"Are you Scots, master?" asked the Comfortable Body sitting on Stansfield's left.

"English outside" — Percy Dukes patted the front of his gray suit, slid a flask from its hip pocket, and took a swig — "and Scotch within." His loud laugh, or the blizzard, shook the railway carriage. The Forward Piece giggled.

"You'll need that if we run into a drift and get stuck for the night," said Henry Stansfield.

"Name of Jonah, sir?" The compartment reverberated again.

"I do not apprehend such an eventuality," said the Fusspot. "The stationmaster at Lancaster assured me that the train would get through. We are scandalously late already, though." Once again the gold watch was consulted.

"It's a curious thing," remarked the Deep Chap meditatively, "the way we imagine we can make Time amble withal or gallop withal, just by keeping an eye on the hands of a watch. You travel frequently by this train, Mr. —— ?"

"Kilmington. Arthur J. Kilmington. No, I've only used it once before." The Fusspot spoke in a dry Edinburgh accent.

"Ah, yes, that would have been on the 17th of last month. I remember seeing you on it."

"No, sir, you are mistaken. It was the 20th." Mr. Kilmington's thin mouth snapped tight again, like a rubber band round a sheaf of legal documents.

"The 20th? Indeed? That was the day of the train robbery. A big haul they got, it seems. Off this very train. It was carrying some of the extra Christmas mail. Bags just disappeared, somewhere between Lancaster and Carlisle."

"Och, deary me," sighed the Comfortable Body. "I don't know what we're coming to, really, nowadays."

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"We're coming to the scene of the crime, ma'am," said the expansive Mr. Dukes. The train, almost dead-beat, was panting up the last pitch towards Shap Summit.

"I didn't see anything in the papers about where the robbery took place," Henry Stansfield murmured. Dukes fastened a somewhat bleary eye upon him.

"You read all the newspapers?"

"Yes."

The atmosphere in the compartment had grown suddenly tense. Only the Flash Card, idly examining his fingernails, seemed unaffected by it.

"Which paper did you see it in?" pursued Stansfield.

"I didn't." Dukes tapped Stansfield on the knee. "But I can use my loaf. Stands to reason. You want to tip a mail-bag out of a train — get me? Train must be moving slowly, or the bag'll burst when it hits the ground. Only one place between Lancaster and Carlisle where you'd *know* the train would be crawling. Shap Bank. And it goes slowest on the last bit of the bank, just about where we are now. Follow?"

Henry Stansfield nodded.

"O.K. But you'd be balmy to tip it off just anywhere on this God-forsaken moorland," went on Mr. Dukes. "Now, if you'd traveled this line as much as I have, you'd have noticed it goes over a bridge about a mile short of the summit. Under the bridge runs a road: a nice, lonely road, see? The only road hereabouts that touches the railway. You tip out the bag there. Your chums collect it, run down the embankment, dump it in the car they've got waiting by the bridge, and Bob's your uncle!"

"You oughta been a detective, mister," exclaimed the Forward Piece languishingly.

Mr. Dukes inserted his thumbs in his armpits, looking gratified. "Maybe I am," he said with a wheezy laugh. "And maybe I'm just little old P.D., who knows how to use his loaf."

"Och, well now, the things people will do?" said the Comfortable Body. "There's a terrible lot of dishonesty today."

The Flash Card glanced up contemptuously from his fingernails. Mr. Kilmington was heard to mutter that the system of surveillance on railways was disgraceful, and the Guard of the train should have been severely censured.

"The Guard can't be everywhere," said Stansfield. "Presumably he has to patrol the train from time to time, and ——"

"Let him do so, then, and not lock himself up in his van and go to sleep," interrupted Mr. Kilmington, somewhat unreasonably.

"Are you speaking from personal experience, sir?" asked Stansfield.

The Flash Card lifted up his voice and said, in a Charing-Cross-Road American accent, "Hey, fellas! If the gang was gonna tip out the mail-bags by the bridge, like this guy says — what I mean is, how could they rely on the Guard being out of his van just at that point?" He hitched up

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the trousers of his loud check suit.

"You've got something there," said Percy Dukes. "What I reckon is, there must have been two accomplices on the train — one to get the Guard out of his van on some pretext, and the other to chuck off the bags." He turned to Mr. Kilmington. "You were saying something about the Guard locking himself up in his van. Now if I was of a suspicious turn of mind, if I was little old Sherlock H. in person" — he bestowed another prodigious wink upon Kilmington's fellow-travelers — "I'd begin to wonder about you, sir. You were traveling on this train when the robbery took place. You went to the Guard's van. You *say* you found him asleep. You didn't by any chance call the Guard out, so as to ——?"

"Your suggestion is outrageous! I advise you to be very careful, sir, very careful indeed," enunciated Mr. Kilmington, his precise voice crackling with indignation, "or you may find you have said something actionable. I would have you know that, when I ——"

But what he would have them know was to remain undivulged. The train, which for some little time had been running cautiously down from Shap Summit, suddenly began to chatter and shudder, like a fever patient in high delirium, as the vacuum brakes were applied: then, with the dull impact of a fist driving into a feather pillow, the engine buried itself in a drift which had gathered just beyond the bend of a deep cutting.

It was just five minutes past seven.

"What's this?" asked the Forward Piece, rather shrilly, as a hysterical outburst of huffing and puffing came from the engine.

"Run into a drift, I reckon."

"He's trying to back us out. No good. The wheels are slipping every time. What a lark!" Percy Dukes had his head out of the window on the lee side of the train. "Coom to Coomberland for your winter sports!"

"Guard! Guard, I say!" called Mr. Kilmington. But the blue-clad figure, after one glance into the compartment, hurried on his way up the corridor. "Really! I *shall* report that man."

Henry Stansfield, going out into the corridor, opened a window. Though the coach was theoretically sheltered by the cutting on this windward side, the blizzard stunned his face like a knuckleduster of ice. He joined the herd of passengers who had climbed down and were stumbling towards the engine. As they reached it, the Guard emerged from the cab: no cause for alarm, he said; if they couldn't get through, there'd be a relief engine sent down to take the train back to Penrith; he was just off to set fog-signals on the line behind them.

The driver renewed his attempts to back the train out. But what with its weight, the up-gradient in its rear, the icy rails, and the clinging grip of the drift on the engine, he could not budge her.

"We'll have to dig out the bogeys,

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mate," he said to his fireman. "Fetch them shovels from the forward van. It'll keep the perishers from freezing, anyhow." He jerked his finger at the knot of passengers who, lit up by the glare of the furnace, were capering and beating their arms like savages amid the swirling snow-wreaths.

Percy Dukes, who had now joined them, quickly established himself as the life and soul of the party, referring to the grimy-faced fireman as "Snowball," adjuring his companions to "Dig for Victory," affecting to spy the approach of a herd of St. Bernards, each with a keg of brandy slung round its neck. But after ten minutes of hard digging, when the leading wheels of the bogey were cleared, it could be seen that they had been derailed by their impact with the drift.

"That's torn it, Charlie. You'll have to walk back to the box and get 'em to telephone through for help," said the driver.

"*If* the wires aren't down already," replied the fireman lugubriously. "It's above a mile to that box, and uphill. Who d'you think I am. Captain Scott?"

"You'll have the wind behind you, mate, anyhow. So long."

A buzz of dismay had risen from the passengers at this. One or two, who began to get querulous, were silenced by the driver's offering to take them anywhere they liked if they would just lift his engine back onto the metals first. When the rest had dispersed to their carriages, Henry Stansfield asked the driver's permission to go up into the cab for a few minutes and dry his coat.

"You're welcome." The driver snorted: "Would you believe it? 'Must get to Glasgow tonight.' Damn ridiculous! Now Bert — that's my Guard — it's different for him: he's entitled to fret a bit. Missus been very poorly. Thought she was going to peg out before Christmas; but he got the best surgeon in Glasgow to operate on her, and she's mending now, he says. He reckons to look in every night at the nursing home, when he goes off work."

Stansfield chatted with the man for five minutes. Then the Guard returned, blowing upon his hands — a smallish, leathery-faced chap, with an anxious look in his eye.

"We'll not get through tonight, Bert. Charlie told you?"

"Aye. I doubt some of the passengers are going to create a rumpus," said the Guard dolefully.

Henry Stansfield went back to his compartment. It was stuffy, but with a sinster hint of chilliness, too: he wondered how long the steam heating would last: depended upon the amount of water in the engine boiler, he supposed. Among the wide variety of fates he had imagined for himself, freezing to death in an English train was not included.

Arthur J. Kilmington fidgeted more than ever. When the Guard came along the corridor, he asked him where the nearest village was, saying he must get a telephone call through to Edinburgh — most urgent appointment

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— must let his client know, if he was going to miss it. The Guard said there was a village two miles to the north-east; you could see the lights from the top of the cutting; but he warned Mr. Kilmington against trying to get there in the teeth of this blizzard — better wait for the relief engine, which should reach them before 9 p.m.

Silence fell upon the compartment for a while; the incredulous silence of civilized people who find themselves in the predicament of castaways. Then the expansive Mr. Dukes proposed that, since they were to be stuck here for an hour or two, they should get acquainted. The Comfortable Body now introduced herself as Mrs. Grant, the Forward Piece as Inez Blake; the Flash Card, with the over-negligent air of one handing a dud half-crown over a counter, gave his name as Macdonald — I. Macdonald.

The talk reverted to the train robbery and the criminals who had perpetrated it.

"They must be awfu' clever," remarked Mrs. Grant, in her singsong Lowland accent.

"No criminals are clever, ma'am," said Stansfield quietly. His ruminative eye passed, without haste, from Macdonald to Dukes. "Neither the small fry nor the big operators. They're pretty well subhuman, the whole lot of 'em. A dash of cunning, a thick streak of cowardice, and the rest is made up of stupidity and boastfulness. They're too stupid for anything but crime, and so riddled with inferiority that they always give themselves away, sooner or later, by boasting about their crimes. They like to think of themselves as the wide boys, but they're as narrow as starved eels — why, they haven't even the wits to alter their professional methods: that's how the police pick' em up."

"I entirely agree, sir," Mr. Kilmington snapped. "In my profession I see a good deal of the criminal classes. And I flatter myself none of them has ever got the better of me. They're transparent, sir, transparent."

"No doubt you gentlemen are right," said Percy Dukes comfortably. "But the police haven't picked up the chaps who did this train robbery yet."

"They will. And the Countess of Axminister's emerald bracelet. Bet the gang didn't reckon to find that in the mail-bag. Worth all of £25,000."

Percy Dukes' mouth fell open. The Flash Card whistled. Overcome, either by the stuffiness of the carriage or the thought of £25,000-worth of emeralds, Inez Blake gave a little moan and fainted all over Mr. Kilmington's lap.

"Really! Upon my soul! My dear young lady!" exclaimed that worthy. There was a flutter of solicitude, shared by all except the cold-eyed young Macdonald who, after stooping over her a moment, his back to the others, said, "Here you — stop pawing the young lady and let her stretch out on the seat. Yes, I'm talking to you, Kilmington."

"How dare you! This is an outrage!" The little man stood up so

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abruptly that the girl was almost rolled onto the floor. "I was merely trying to ——"

"I know your sort. Nasty old men. Now, keep your hands off her. I'm telling you."

In the shocked silence that ensued, Kilmington gobbled speechlessly at Macdonald for a moment; then, seeing razors in the youth's cold-steel eye, snatched his black hat and brief-case from the rack and bolted out of the compartment. Henry Stansfield made as if to stop him, then changed his mind. Mrs. Grant followed the little man out, returning presently, her handkerchief soaked in water, to dab Miss Blake's forehead. The time was just 8:30.

When things were restored to normal, Mr. Dukes turned to Stansfield. "You were saying this necklace of — who was it? — the Countess of Axminster, it's worth £25,000? Fancy sending a thing of that value through the post! Are you sure of it?"

"The value? Oh, yes." Henry Stansfield spoke out of the corner of his mouth, in the manner of a stupid man imparting a confidence. "Don't let this go any further. But I've a friend who works in the Cosmopolitan — the Company where it's insured. That's another thing that didn't get into the papers. Silly woman. She wanted it for some big family-do in Scotland at Christmas, forgot to bring it with her, and wrote home for it to be posted to her in a registered packet."

"£25,000," said Percy Dukes thoughtfully. "Well, stone me down!"

"Yes. Some people don't know when they're lucky, do they?"

Duke's fat face wobbled on his shoulders like a globe of lard. Young Macdonald polished his nails. Inez Blake read her magazine. After a while Percy Dukes remarked that the blizzard was slackening; he'd take an airing and see if there was any sign of the relief engine yet. He left the compartment.

At the window the snowflakes danced in their tens now, not their thousands. The time was 8:55. Shortly afterwards Inez Blake went out; and ten minutes later Mrs. Grant remarked to Stansfield that it had stopped snowing altogether. Neither Inez nor Dukes had returned when, at 9:30, Henry Stansfield decided to ask what had happened about the relief. The Guard was not in his van, which adjoined Stansfield's coach, towards the rear of the train. So he turned back, walked up the corridor to the front coach, clambered out, and hailed the engine cab.

"She must have been held up," said the Guard, leaning out. "Charlie here got through from the box, and they promised her by nine o'clock. But it'll no' be long now, sir."

"Have you seen anything of a Mr. Kilmington — small, sandy chap — black hat and overcoat, blue suit — was in my compartment? I've walked right up the train and he doesn't seem to be on it."

The Guard pondered a moment. "Och aye, you wee fellow? Him that

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asked me about telephoning from the village. Aye, he's awa' then."

"He did set off to walk there, you mean?"

"Nae doot he did, if he's no' on the train. He spoke to me again — juist on nine, it'd be — and said he was awa' if the relief didna turn up in five minutes."

"You've not seen him since?"

"No, sir. I've been talking to my mates here this half-hour, ever syne the wee fellow spoke to me."

Henry Stansfield walked thoughtfully back down the permanent way. When he had passed out of the glare shed by the carriage lights on the snow, he switched on his electric torch. Just beyond the last coach the eastern wall of the cutting sloped sharply down and merged into moorland level with the track. Although the snow had stopped altogether, an icy wind from the northeast still blew, raking and numbing his face. Twenty yards farther on his torch lit up a track, already half filled in with snow, made by several pairs of feet, pointing away over the moor, towards the northeast. Several passengers, it seemed had set off for the village, whose lights twinkled like frost in the far distance. Stansfield was about to follow this track when he heard footsteps scrunching the snow farther up the line. He switched off the torch; at once it was as if a sack had been thrown over his head, so close and blinding was the darkness. The steps came nearer. Stansfield switched on his torch, at the last minute, pinpointing the squat figure of Percy Dukes. The man gave a muffled oath.

"What the devil! Here, what's the idea, keeping me waiting half an hour in that blasted ——?"

"Have you seen Kilmington?"

"Oh, it's you. No, how the hell should I have seen him? Isn't he on the train? I've just been walking up the line, to look for the relief. No sign yet. Damn parky, it is — I'm moving on."

Presently Stansfield moved on, too, but along the track towards the village. The circle of his torchlight wavered and bounced on the deep snow. The wind, right in his teeth, was killing. No wonder, he thought, as after a few hundred yards he approached the end of the trail, those passengers turned back. Then he realized they had not all turned back. What he had supposed to be a hummock of snow bearing a crude resemblance to a recumbent human figure, he now saw to be a human figure covered with snow. He scraped some of the snow off it, turned it gently over on its back.

Arthur J. Kilmington would fuss no more in this world. His brief-case was buried beneath him: his black hat was lying where it had fallen, lightly covered with snow, near the head. There seemed, to Stansfield's cursory examination, no mark of violence on him. But the eyeballs started, the face was suffused with a pinkish-blue color. So men look who have been strangled, thought Stansfield, or asphyxiated. Quickly he knelt down

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again, shining his torch in the dead face. A qualm of horror shook him. Mr. Kilmington's nostrils were caked thick with snow, which had frozen solid in them, and snow had been rammed tight into his mouth also.

And here he would have stayed, reflected Stansfield, in this desolate spot, for days or weeks, perhaps, if the snow lay or deepened. And when the thaw at last came (as it did that year, in fact, only after two months), the snow would thaw out from his mouth and nostrils, too, and there would be no vestige of murder left — only the corpse of an impatient little lawyer who had tried to walk to the village in a blizzard and died for his pains. It might even be that no one would ask how such a precise, pernickety little chap had ventured the two-mile walk in these shoes and without a torch to light his way through the pitchy blackness; for Stansfield, going through the man's pockets, had found the following articles — and nothing more: pocketbook, fountain pen, handkerchief, cigarette case, gold lighter, two letters, and some loose change.

Stansfield started to return for help. But only twenty yards back he noticed another trail of footprints, leading off the main track to the left. This trail seemed a fresher one — the snow lay less thickly in the indentations — and to have been made by one pair of feet only. He followed it up, walking beside it. Whoever made this track had walked in a slight right-handed curve back to the railway line, joining it about one hundred and fifty yards up the line from where the main trail came out. At this point there was a platelayers' shack. Finding the door unlocked, Stansfield entered. There was nothing inside but a coke-brazier, stone cold, and a smell of cigar smoke. . . .

Half an hour later, Stansfield returned to his compartment. In the meanwhile, he had helped the train crew to carry back the body of Kilmington, which was now locked in the Guard's van. He had also made an interesting discovery as to Kilmington's movements. It was to be presumed that, after the altercation with Macdonald, and the brief conversation already reported by the Guard, the lawyer must have gone to sit in another compartment. The last coach, to the rear of the Guard's van, was a first-class one, almost empty. But in one of its compartments Stansfield found a passenger asleep. He woke him up, gave a description of Kilmington, and asked if he had seen him earlier.

The passenger grumpily informed Stansfield that a smallish man, in a dark overcoat, with the trousers of a blue suit showing beneath it, had come to the door and had a word with him. No, the passenger had not noticed his face particularly, because he'd been very drowsy himself, and besides, the chap had politely taken off his black Homburg hat to address him, and the hat screened as much of the head as was not cut off from his view by the top of the door. No, the chap had not come into his compartment: he had

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just stood outside, inquired the time (the passenger had looked at his watch and told him it was 8:50); then the chap had said that, if the relief didn't turn up by nine, he intended to walk to the nearest village.

Stansfield had then walked along to the engine cab. The Guard, whom he found there, told him that he'd gone up the track about 8:45 to meet the fireman on his way back from the signal-box. He had gone as far as the place where he'd put down his fog-signals earlier; here, just before nine, he and the fireman met, as the latter corroborated. Returning to the train, the Guard had climbed into the last coach, noticed Kilmington sitting alone in a first-class apartment (it was then that the lawyer announced to the Guard his intention of walking if the relief engine had not arrived within five minutes). The Guard then got out of the train again, and proceeded down the track to talk to his mates in the engine cab.

This evidence would seem to point incontrovertibly at Kilmington's having been murdered shortly after 9 p.m., Stansfield reflected as he went back to his own compartment. His fellow-passengers were all present now.

"Well, did you find him?" asked Percy Dukes.

"Kilmington? Oh, yes, I found him. In the snow over there. He was dead."

Inez Blake gave a little, affected scream. The permanent sneer was wiped, as if by magic, off young Macdonald's face, which turned a sickly white. Mr. Dukes sucked in his fat lips.

"The puir wee man," said Mrs. Grant. "He tried to walk it then? Died of exposure, was it?"

"No," announced Stansfield flatly, "he was murdered."

This time, Inez Blake screamed in earnest; and, like an echo, a hooting shriek came from far up the line: the relief engine was approaching at last.

"The police will be awaiting us back at Penrith, so we'd better all have our stories ready." Stansfield turned to Percy Dukes. "You, for instance, sir. Where were you between 8:55, when you left the carriage, and 9:35 when I met you returning? Are you sure you didn't see Kilmington?"

Dukes, expansive no longer, his piggy eyes sunk deep in the fat of his face, asked Stansfield who the hell he thought he was.

"I am an inquiry agent, employed by the Cosmopolitan Insurance Company. Before that, I was a Detective Inspector in the C.I.D. Here is my card."

Dukes barely glanced at it. "That's all right, old man. Only wanted to make sure. Can't trust anyone nowadays." His voice had taken on the ingratiating, oleaginous heartiness of the small business man trying to clinch a deal with a bigger one. "Just went for a stroll, y'know — stretch the old legs. Didn't see a soul."

"Who were you expecting to see? Didn't you wait for someone in the plate-layers' shack along there, and

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smoke a cigar while you were waiting? Who did you mistake me for when you said 'What's the idea, keeping me waiting half an hour?'"

"Here, draw it mild, old man." Percy Dukes sounded injured. "I certainly looked in at the huts: smoked a cigar for a bit. Then I toddled back to the train, and met up with your good self on the way. I didn't make no appointment to meet ——"

"Oo! Well I *must* say," interrupted Miss Blake virtuously. She could hardly wait to tell Stansfield that, on leaving the compartment shortly after Dukes, she'd overheard voices on the track below the lavatory window. "I recognized this gentleman's voice," she went on, tossing her head at Dukes. "He said something like: 'You're going to help us again, chum, so you'd better get used to the idea. You're in it up to the neck — can't back out now.' And another voice, sort of mumbling, might have been Mr. Kilmington's — I dunno — sounded Scotch anyway — said, 'All right. Meet you in five minutes: platelayers' hut a few hundred yards up the line. Talk it over.'"

"And what did you do then, young lady?" asked Stansfield.

"I happened to meet a gentleman friend, farther up the train, and sat with him for a bit."

"Is that so?" remarked Macdonald menacingly. "Why, you four-flushing little ——!"

"Shut up!" commanded Stansfield.

"Honest I did," the girl said, ignoring Macdonald. "I'll introduce you to him, if you like. He'll tell you I was with him for, oh, half an hour or more."

"And what about Mr. Macdonald?"

"I'm not talking," said the youth sullenly.

"Mr. Macdonald isn't talking. Mrs. Grant?"

"I've been in this compartment ever since, sir."

"Ever since ——?"

"Since I went out to damp my hankie for this young lady, when she'd fainted. Mr. Kilmington was just before me, you'll mind. I saw him go through into the Guard's van."

"Did you hear him say anything about walking to the village?"

"No, sir. He just hurried into the van, and then there was some havers about its no' being lockit this time, and how he was going to report the Guard for it."

"I see. And you've been sitting here with Mr. Macdonald all the time?"

"Yes, sir. Except for ten minutes or so he was out of the compartment, just after you'd left."

"What did you go out for?" Stansfield asked the young man.

"Just taking the air, brother."

"You weren't taking Mr. Kilmington's gold watch, as well as the air, by any chance?" Stansfield's keen eyes were fastened like a hook into Macdonald's, whose insolent expression visibly crumbled beneath them.

"I don't know what you mean," he tried to bluster. "You can't do this to me."

"I mean that a man has been mur-

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dered, and when the police search you, they will find his gold watch in your possession. Won't look too healthy for you, my young friend."

"Naow! Give us a chance! It was only a joke, see?" The wretched Macdonald was whining now, in his native cockney. "He got me riled — the stuck-up way he said nobody'd ever got the better of him. So I thought I'd just show him — I'd have given it back, straight I would, only I couldn't find him afterwards. It was just a joke, I tell you. Anyway, it was Inez who lifted the ticker."

"You dirty little rotter!" screeched the girl.

"Shut up, both of you. You can explain your joke to the Penrith police. Let's hope they don't die of laughing."

At this moment the train gave a lurch, and started back up the gradient. It halted at the signal-box, for Stansfield to telephone to Penrith, then clattered south again.

On Penrith platform Stansfield was met by an Inspector and a Sergeant of the County Constabulary, with the Police Surgeon. Then, after a brief pause in the Guard's van, where the Police Surgeon drew aside the Guard's black off-duty overcoat that had been laid over the body, and began his preliminary examination, they marched along to Stansfield's compartment. The Guard who, at his request, had locked this as the train was drawing up at the platform and was keeping an eye on its occupants, now unlocked it. The Inspector entered.

His first action was to search Macdonald. Finding the watch concealed on his person, he then charged Macdonald and Inez Blake with the theft. The Inspector next proceeded to make an arrest on the charge of wilful murder. . . .

Whom did the Inspector arrest for the murder of Arthur J. Kilmington?

You have been given no less than eight clues by the author; these eight clues should tell you, by logical deduction, not only the identity of the murderer but also the motive of the crime and the method by which it was committed.

Thus, Nicholas Blake returns to the great 'tec tradition, the pure, unadulterated detective story — the great 'tec tradition of Poe, Gaboriau, Collins, Doyle, Zangwill, Futrelle, Freeman, Chesterton, Post, Bramah, Crofts, Christie, Bailey, Sayers, MacDonald, Berkeley, Biggers, Van Dine, Allingham, Hammett, Carr, Simenon, Gardner, Stout, and so many others. And thus, his story, in the great tradition of 'tec titles, might have been called: "A Study in White; or, The Sign of Eight."

We urge you to accept the author's challenge before going further, and when you have interpreted the eight clues compare your solution with Mr. Blake's, which you will find on page 142.

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As we sat down to prepare Cornell Woolrich's "Momentum" for the printer, it occurred to us: what do the British think of Mr. Woolrich and his work? We have no file of English reviews, but we do have one of Mr. Woolrich's books in its London edition, complete with dust-jacket.

It took only a few moments to locate THE DANCING DETECTIVE, *signed, as in the United States, by William Irish, and published by Hutchinson & Co. The inside front-flap of the dust-wrapper revealed two paragraphs of comment, written presumably by the English publishing house.*

While it is not always safe, or even wise, to trust a publisher's blurb, we could find no fault with the one describing THE DANCING DETECTIVE. *We quote: "A superb collection of spine-chillers, each a polished example of the art of detection, in which Mr. Irish again proves his unique ability to let the reader share the agony of the hunted and the terror of the doomed . . . . Grim humour runs through some of the tales, taut suspense through them all; for William Irish is a master of the sinister and the macabre, and in a class by himself in the psychological horror story."*

Under his own name of Cornell Woolrich or under the pseudonym of William Irish, the work of this powerful writer is all that the advertising blurb claims. For once we agreed with every word, and we could not but admire the British publisher's critical acumen. And then another thought occurred to us: how did the British publisher's judgment compare with the American publisher's?

It took only a few moments to locate a copy of THE DANCING DETECTIVE, *as published by Lippincott's of Philadelphia. We opened the book and turned to the inside front-flap of the dust-jacket. Well, what do you know? Yes, you've guessed it: the publisher's comment on the English dust-wrapper was taken word-for-word from the dust-jacket of the American edition, published more than a year prior to the London edition. There was only one small change: the English publisher changed the spelling of the word "humor" to "humour" . . .*

MOMENTUM

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

PAINE hung around outside the house waiting for old Ben Burroughs' caller to go, because he wanted to see him alone. You can't very well ask anyone for a loan of $250 in the presence of someone else, especially when you have a pretty strong hunch you're going to be

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turned down flat and told where to get off into the bargain.

But he had a stronger reason for not wanting witnesses to his interview with the old skinflint. The large handkerchief in his back pocket, folded triangularly, had a special purpose, and that little instrument in another pocket — wasn't it to be used in prying open a window?

While he lurked in the shrubbery, watching the lighted window and Burroughs' seated form inside it, he kept rehearsing the plea he'd composed, as though he were still going to use it.

"Mr. Burroughs, I know it's late, and I know you'd rather not be reminded that I exist, but desperation can't wait, and I'm desperate." That sounded good. "Mr. Burroughs, I worked for your concern faithfully for ten long years, and the last six months of its existence, to help keep it going, I voluntarily worked at half wages, on your given word that my defaulted pay would be made up as soon as things got better. Instead of that, you went into phony bankruptcy to cancel your obligations."

Then a little soft soap to take the sting out of it. "I haven't come near you all these years, and I haven't come to make trouble now. If I thought you really didn't have the money, I still wouldn't. But it's common knowledge by now that the bankruptcy was feigned; it's obvious by the way you continue to live that you salvaged your own investment; and I've lately heard rumors of your backing a dummy corporation under another name to take up where you left off. Mr. Burroughs, the exact amount of the six-months promissory half wages due me is two hundred and fifty dollars."

Just the right amount of dignity and self-respect, Pauline had commented at this point; not wishy-washy or maudlin, just quiet and effective.

And then for a bang-up finish, and every word of it true. "Mr. Burroughs, I have to have help tonight; it can't wait another twenty-four hours. There's a hole the size of a fifty-cent-piece in the sole of each of my shoes, I have a wedge of cardboard in the bottom of each one. We haven't had light or gas in a week now. There's a bailiff coming tomorrow morning to put out the little that's left of our furniture and seal the door.

"If I was alone in this, I'd still fight it through, without going to anyone. But, Mr. Burroughs, I have a wife at home to support. You may not remember her, a pretty little dark-haired girl who once worked as a stenographer in your office for a month or two. You surely wouldn't know her now, she's aged twenty years in the past two."

That was about all. That was about all anyone could have said. And yet Paine knew he was licked before he even uttered a word of it.

He couldn't see the old man's visitor. The caller was out of range of the window. Burroughs was seated in a line with it, profile toward Paine.

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Paine could see his mean, thin-lipped mouth moving. Once or twice he raised his hand in a desultory gesture. Then he seemed to be listening and finally he nodded slowly. He held his forefinger up and shook it, as if impressing some point on his auditor. After that he rose and moved deeper into the room, but without getting out of line with the window.

He stood against the far wall, hand out to a tapestry hanging there. Paine craned his neck, strained his eyes. There must be a wall safe behind there the old codger was about to open.

If he only had a pair of binoculars handy.

Paine saw the old miser pause, turn his head and make some request of the other person. A hand abruptly grasped the looped shade cord and drew the shade to the bottom.

Paine gritted his teeth. The old fossil wasn't taking any chances, was he? You'd think he was a mind-reader, knew there was someone out there. But a chink remained, showing a line of light at the bottom. Paine sidled out of his hiding place and slipped up to the window. He put his eyes to it, focused on Burroughs' dialing hand, to the exclusion of everything else.

A three-quarters turn to the left, about to where the numeral 8 would be on the face of a clock. Then back to about where 3 would be. Then back the other way, this time to 10. Simple enough. He must remember that — 8-3-10.

Burroughs was opening it now and bringing out a cash box. He set it down on the table and opened it. Paine's eyes hardened and his mouth twisted sullenly. Look at all that money! The old fossil's gnarled hand dipped into it, brought out a sheaf of bills, counted them. He put back a few, counted the remainder a second time and set them on the table-top while he returned the cash box, closed the safe, straightened out the tapestry.

A blurred figure moved partly into the way at this point, too close to the shade gap to come clearly into focus; but without obliterating the little stack of bills on the table. Burroughs' claw-like hand picked them up, held them out. A second hand, smoother, reached for them. The two hands shook.

Paine prudently retreated to his former lookout point. He knew where the safe was now, that was all that mattered. He wasn't a moment too soon. The shade shot up an instant later, this time with Burroughs' hand guiding its cord. The other person had withdrawn offside again. Burroughs moved after him out of range, and the room abruptly darkened. A moment later a light flickered on in the porch ceiling.

Paine quickly shifted to the side of the house, in the moment's grace given him, in order to make sure his presence wasn't detected.

The door opened. Burroughs' voice croaked a curt " 'Night," to which the departing visitor made no answer. The interview had evidently not been

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an altogether cordial one. The door closed again, with quite a little force. A quick step crossed the porch, went along the cement walk to the street, away from where Paine stood pressed flat against the side of the house. He didn't bother trying to see who it was. It was too dark for that, and his primary purpose was to keep his own presence concealed.

When the anonymous tread had safely died away in the distance, Paine moved to where he could command the front of the house. Burroughs was alone in it now, he knew; he was too niggardly even to employ a full-time servant. A dim light showed for a moment or two through the fanlight over the door, coming from the back of the hall. Now was the time to ring the doorbell, if he expected to make his plea to the old duffer before he retired.

He knew that, and yet something seemed to be keeping him from stepping up onto the porch and ringing the doorbell. He knew what it was, too, but he wouldn't admit it to himself.

"He'll only say no pointblank and slam the door in my face," was the excuse he gave himself as he crouched back in the shrubbery, waiting. "And then once he's seen me out here, I'll be the first one he'll suspect afterwards when —"

The fanlight had gone dark now and Burroughs was on his way upstairs. A bedroom window on the floor above lighted up. There was still time; if he rang even now, Burroughs would come downstairs again and answer the door. But Paine didn't make the move, stayed there patiently waiting.

The bedroom window blacked out at last, and the house was now dark and lifeless. Paine stayed there, still fighting with himself. Not a battle, really, because that had been lost long ago; but still giving himself excuses for what he knew he was about to do. Excuses for not going off about his business and remaining what he had been until now — an honest man.

How could he face his wife, if he came back empty-handed tonight? Tomorrow their furniture would be piled on the sidewalk. Night after night he had promised to tackle Burroughs, and each time he'd put it off, walked past the house without summoning up nerve enough to go through with it. Why? For one thing, he didn't have the courage to stomach the sharp-tongued, sneering refusal that he was sure he'd get. But the more important thing had been the realization that once he made his plea, he automatically cancelled this other, unlawful way of getting the money. Burroughs had probably forgotten his existence after all these years, but if he reminded him of it by interviewing him ahead of time —

He tightened his belt decisively. Well, he wasn't coming home to her empty-handed tonight, but he still wasn't going to tackle Burroughs for it either. She'd never need to find out just how he'd got it.

He straightened and looked all

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around him. No one in sight. The house was isolated. Most of the streets around it were only laid out and paved by courtesy; they bordered vacant lots. He moved in cautiously but determinedly toward the window of that room where he had seen the safe.

Cowardice can result in the taking of more risks than the most reckless courage. He was afraid of little things — afraid of going home and facing his wife empty-handed, afraid of asking an ill-tempered old reprobate for money because he knew he would be reviled and driven away — and so he was about to break into a house, become a burglar for the first time in his life.

It opened so easily. It was almost an invitation to unlawful entry. He stood up on the sill, and the cover of a paper book of matches, thrust into the intersection between the two window halves, pushed the tongue of the latch out of the way.

He dropped down to the ground, applied the little instrument he had brought to the lower frame, and it slid effortlessly up. A minute later he was in the room, had closed the window so it wouldn't look suspicious from the outside. He wondered why he'd always thought until now it took skill and patience to break into a house. There was nothing to it.

He took out the folded handkerchief and tied it around the lower part of his face. For a minute he wasn't going to bother with it, and later he was sorry he had, in one way. And then again, it probably would have happened anyway, even without it. It wouldn't keep him from being seen, only from being identified.

He knew enough not to light the room lights, but he had nothing so scientific as a pocket torch with him to take their place. He had to rely on ordinary matches, which meant he could only use one hand for the safe dial, after he had cleared the tapestry out of the way.

It was a toy thing, a gimcrack. He hadn't even the exact combination, just the approximate position — 8-3-10. It wouldn't work the first time, so he varied it slightly, and then it clicked free.

He opened it, brought out the cash box, set it on the table. It was as though the act of setting it down threw a master electric switch. The room was suddenly drenched with light and Burroughs stood in the open doorway, bathrobe around his weazened frame, left hand out to the wall switch, right hand holding a gun trained on Paine.

Paine's knees knocked together, his windpipe constricted, and he died a little — the way only an amateur caught red-handed at his first attempt can, a professional never. His thumb stung unexpectedly, and he mechanically whipped out the live match he was holding.

"Just got down in time, didn't I?" the old man said with spiteful satisfaction. "It mayn't be much of a safe, but it sets off a buzzer up by my bed every time it swings open."

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He should have moved straight across to the phone, right there in the room with Paine, and called for help, but he had a vindictive streak in him, he couldn't resist standing and rubbing it in.

"Ye know what ye're going to get for this, don't ye?" he went on, licking his indrawn lips. "And I'll see that ye get it too, every last month of it that's coming to ye." He took a step forward. "Now get away from that. Get all the way back over there and don't ye make a move until I —"

A sudden dawning suspicion entered his glittering little eyes. "Wait a minute. Haven't I seen you somewhere before? There's something familiar about you." He moved closer. "Take off that mask," he ordered. "Let me see who the devil you are!"

Paine became panic-stricken at the thought of revealing his face. He didn't stop to think that as long as Burroughs had him at gun-point anyway, and he couldn't get away, the old man was bound to find out who he was sooner or later.

He shook his head in unreasoning terror.

"No!" he panted hoarsely, billowing out the handkerchief over his mouth. He even tried to back away, but there was a chair or something in the way, and he couldn't.

That brought the old man in closer. "Then by golly I'll take it off for ye!" he snapped. He reached out for the lower triangular point of it. His right hand slanted out of line with Paine's body. as he did so, was no longer exactly covering it with the gun. But the variation was nothing to take a chance on.

Cowardice. Cowardice that spurs you to a rashness the stoutest courage would quail from. Paine didn't stop to think of the gun. He suddenly hooked onto both the old man's arms, spread-eagled them. It was such a harebrained chance to take that Burroughs wasn't expecting it, and accordingly it worked. The gun clicked futilely, pointed up toward the ceiling; it must have jammed, or else the first chamber was empty and Burroughs hadn't known it.

Paine kept warding that arm off at a wide angle. But his chief concern was the empty hand clawing toward the handkerchief. That he swiveled far downward the other way, out of reach. He twisted the scrawny skin around the old man's skinny right wrist until pain made the hand flop over open and drop the gun. It fell between them to the floor, and Paine scuffed it a foot or two out of reach with the side of his foot.

Then he locked that same foot behind one of Burroughs' and pushed him over it. The old man went sprawling backwards on the floor, and the short, unequal struggle was over. Yet even as he went, he was victorious. His downflung left arm, as Paine released it to send him over, swept up in an arc, clawed, and took the handkerchief with it.

He sprawled there now, cradled on the point of one elbow, breathing

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malign recognition that was like a knife through Paine's heart. "You're Dick Paine, you dirty crook! I know ye now! You're Dick Paine, my old employee! You're going to pay for this —"

That was all he had time to say. That was his own death warrant. Paine was acting under such neuromuscular compulsion, brought on by the instinct of self-preservation, that he wasn't even conscious of stooping to retrieve the fallen gun. The next thing he knew it was in his hand, pointed toward the accusing mouth that was all he was afraid of.

He jerked the trigger. For the second time it clicked — either jammed or unloaded at that chamber. He was to have that on his conscience afterwards, that click — like a last chance given him to keep from doing what he was about to do. That made it something different, that took away the shadowy little excuse he would have had until now; that changed it from an impulsive act committed in the heat of combat to a deed of cold-blooded, deliberate murder, with plenty of time to think twice before it was committed. And conscience makes cowards of us all. And he was a coward to begin with.

Burroughs even had time to sputter the opening syllables of a desperate plea for mercy, a promise of immunity. True, he probably wouldn't have kept it.

"Don't! Paine — Dick, don't! I won't say anything, I won't tell 'em you were here —"

But Burroughs knew who he was. Paine tugged at the trigger, and the third chamber held death in it. This time the gun crashed, and Burroughs' whole face was veiled in a huff of smoke. By the time it had thinned he was already dead, head on the floor, a tenuous thread of red streaking from the corner of his mouth, as though he had no more than split his lip.

Paine was the amateur even to the bitter end. In the death hush that followed, his first half-audible remark was: "Mr. Burroughs, I didn't mean to —"

Then he just stared in white-faced consternation. "Now I've done it! I've killed a man — and they kill you for that! Now I'm in for it!"

He looked at the gun, appalled, as though it alone, and not he, was to blame for what had happened. He picked up the handkerchief, dazedly rubbed at the weapon, then desisted again. It seemed to him safer to take it with him, even though it was Burroughs' own. He had an amateur's mystic dread of fingerprints. He was sure he wouldn't be able to clean it thoroughly enough to remove all traces of his own handling; even in the very act of trying to clean it, he might leave others. He sheathed it in the inner pocket of his coat.

He looked this way and that. He'd better get out of here; he'd better get out of here. Already the drums of flight were beginning to beat in him, and he knew they'd never be silent again.

The cash box was still standing

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there on the table where he'd left it, and he went to it, flung the lid up. He didn't want this money any more, it had curdled for him, it had become blood money. But he had to have some, at least; to make it easier to keep from getting caught. He didn't stop to count how much there was in it; there must have been at least a thousand, by the looks of it. Maybe even fifteen or eighteen hundred.

He wouldn't take a cent more than was coming to him. He'd only take the two hundred and fifty he'd come here to get. To his frightened mind that seemed to make his crime less heinous, if he contented himself with taking just what was rightfully his. That seemed to keep it from being outright murder and robbery, enabled him to maintain the fiction that it had been just a collection of a debt accompanied by a frightful and unforeseen accident. And one's conscience, after all, is the most dreaded policeman of the lot.

And furthermore, he realized as he hastily counted it out, thrust the sum into his back trouser pocket, buttoned the pocket down, he couldn't tell his wife that he'd been here — or she'd know what he'd done. He'd have to make her think that he'd got the money somewhere else. That shouldn't be hard. He'd put off coming here to see Burroughs night after night, he'd shown her plainly that he hadn't relished the idea of approaching his former boss; she'd been the one who had kept egging him on.

Only tonight she'd said, "I don't think you'll ever carry it out. I've about given up hope."

So what more natural than to let her think that in the end he hadn't? He'd think up some other explanation to account for the presence of the money; he'd have to. If not right tonight, then tomorrow. It would come to him after the shock of this had worn off a little and he could think more calmly.

Had he left anything around that would betray him, that they could trace to him? He'd better put the cash box back; there was just a chance that they wouldn't know exactly how much the old skinflint had had on hand. They often didn't, with his type. He wiped it off carefully with the handkerchief he'd had around his face, twisted the dial closed on it, dabbed at that. He didn't go near the window again; he put out the light and made his way out by the front door of the house.

He opened it with the handkerchief and closed it after him again, and after an exhaustive survey of the desolate street, came down off the porch, moved quickly along the front walk, turned left along the gray tape of sidewalk that threaded the gloom, toward the distant trolley line that he wasn't going to board at this particular stop, at this particular hour.

He looked up once or twice at the star-flecked sky as he trudged along. It was over. That was all there was to it. Just a jealously guarded secret now. A memory, that he daren't share with anyone else, not even

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Pauline. But deep within him he knew better. It wasn't over, it was just beginning. That had been just the curtain raiser, back there. Murder, like a snowball rolling down a slope, gathers momentum as it goes.

He had to have a drink. He had to try to drown the damn thing out of him. He couldn't go home dry with it on his mind. They stayed open until four, didn't they, places like that? He wasn't much of a drinker, he wasn't familiar with details like that. Yes, there was one over there, on the other side of the street. And this was far enough away, more than two-thirds of the way from Burroughs' to his own place.

It was empty. That might be better; then again it might not. He could be too easily remembered. Well, too late now, he was already at the bar. "A straight whiskey." The barman didn't even have time to turn away before he spoke again. "Another one."

He shouldn't have done that; that looked suspicious, to gulp it that quick.

"Turn that radio off," he said harriedly. He shouldn't have said that, that sounded suspicious. The barman had looked at him when he did. And the silence was worse, if anything. Unbearable. Those throbbing drums of danger. "Never mind, turn it on again."

"Make up your mind, mister," the barman said in mild reproof.

He seemed to be doing all the wrong things. He shouldn't have come in here at all, to begin with. Well, he'd get out, before he put his foot in it any worse. "How much?" He took out the half-dollar and the quarter that was all he had.

"Eighty cents."

His stomach dropped an inch. Not *that* money! He didn't want to have to bring that out, it would show too plainly on his face. "Most places they charge a thirty-five a drink."

"Not this brand. You didn't specify." But the barman was on guard now, scenting a dead-beat. He was leaning over the counter, right square in front of him, in a position to take in every move he made with his hands.

He shouldn't have ordered that second drink. Just for a nickel he was going to have to take that whole wad out right under this man's eyes. And maybe he wouldn't remember that tomorrow, after the jumpy way Paine had acted in here!

"Where's the washroom?"

"That door right back there behind the cigarette machine." But the barman was now plainly suspicious; Paine could tell that by the way he kept looking at him.

Paine closed it after him, sealed it with his shoulder blades, unbuttoned his back pocket, riffled through the money, looking for the smallest possible denomination. A ten was the smallest, and there was only one of them; that would have to do. He cursed himself for getting into such a spot.

The door suddenly gave a heave behind him. Not a violent one, but he

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wasn't expecting it. It threw him forward off balance. The imperfectly grasped outspread fan of money in his hand went scattering all over the floor. The barman's head showed through the aperture. He started to say: "I don't like the way you're acting. Come on now, get out of my pla —" Then he saw the money.

Burroughs' gun had been an awkward bulk for his inside coat pocket all along. The grip was too big, it overspanned the lining. His abrupt lurch forward had shifted it. It felt as if it was about to fall out of its own weight. He clutched as it to keep it in.

The barman saw the gesture, closed in on him with a grunted "I thought so!" that might have meant nothing or everything.

He was no Burroughs to handle, he was an ox of a man. He pinned Paine back against the wall and held him there more or less helpless. Even so, if he'd only shut up, it probably wouldn't have happened. But he made a tunnel of his mouth and bayed: "Pol-eece! Holdup! Help!"

Paine lost the little presence of mind he had left, became a blurred pinwheel of hand motion, impossible to control or forestall. Something exploded against the barman's midriff, as though he'd had a firecracker tucked in under his belt.

He coughed his way down to the floor and out of the world.

Another one. Two now. Two in less than an hour. Paine didn't think the words, they seemed to glow out at him, emblazoned on the grimy washroom walls in characters of fire, like in that Biblical story.

He took a step across the prone, white-aproned form as stiffly as though he were high up on stilts. He looked out through the door crack. No one in the bar. And it probably hadn't been heard outside in the street; it had had two doors to go through.

He put the damned thing away, the thing that seemed to be spreading death around just by being in his possession. If he hadn't brought it with him from Burroughs' house, this man would have been alive now. But if he hadn't brought it with him, he would have been apprehended for the first murder by now. Why blame the weapon, why not just blame fate?

That money, all over the floor. He squatted, went for it bill by bill, counting as he went. Twenty, forty, sixty, eighty. Some of them were on one side of the corpse, some on the other; he had to cross over, not once but several times, in the course of his grisly paper chase. One was even pinned partly under him, and when he'd wangled it out, there was a swirl of blood on the edge. He grimaced, thrust it out, blotted it off. Some of it stayed on, of course.

He had it all now, or thought he did. He couldn't stay in here another minute, he felt as if he were choking. He got it all into his pocket any old way, buttoned it down. Then he eased out, this time looking behind him at what he'd done, not before him. That was how he missed seeing

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the drunk, until it was too late and the drunk had already seen him.

The drunk was pretty drunk, but maybe not drunk enough to take a chance on. He must have weaved in quietly, while Paine was absorbed in retrieving the money. He was bending over reading the list of selections on the coin phonograph. He raised his head before Paine could get back in again, and to keep him from seeing what lay on the floor in there Paine quickly closed the door behind him.

"Say, itsh about time," the drunk complained. "How about a little servish here?"

Paine tried to shadow his face as much as he could with the brim of his hat. "I'm not in charge here," he mumbled, "I'm just a customer myself —"

The drunk was going to be sticky. He barnacled onto Paine's lapels as he tried to sidle by. "Don't gimme that. You just hung up your coat in there, you think you're quitting for the night. Well you ain't quitting until I've had my drink —"

Paine tried to shake him off without being too violent about it and bringing on another hand-to-hand set-to. He hung on like grim death. Or rather, he hung on *to* grim death — without knowing it.

Paine fought down the flux of panic, the ultimate result of which he'd already seen twice now. Any minute someone might come in from the street. Someone sober. "All right," he breathed heavily, "hurry up, what'll it be?"

"Thass more like it, now you're being reg'lar guy." The drunk released him and he went around behind the bar. "Never anything but good ole Four Roses for mine truly— "

Paine snatched down a bottle at random from the shelf, handed it over bodily. "Here, help yourself. You'll have to take it outside with you, I'm — we're closing up for the night now." He found a switch, threw it. It only made part of the lights go out. There was no time to bother with the rest. He hustled the bottle-nursing drunk out ahead of him, pulled the door to after the two of them, so that it would appear to be locked even if it wasn't.

The drunk started to make loud plaint, looping around on the sidewalk. "You're a fine guy, not even a glass to drink it out of!"

Paine gave him a slight push in one direction, wheeled and made off in the other.

The thing was, how drunk was he? Would he remember Paine, would he know him if he saw him again? He hurried on, spurred to a run by the night-filling hails and imprecations resounding behind him. He couldn't do it again. Three lives in an hour. He couldn't!

The night was fading when he turned into the little courtyard that was his own. He staggered up the stairs, but not from the two drinks he'd had, from the two deaths.

He stood outside his own door at last — 3-B. It seemed such a funny

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thing to do after killing people — fumble around in your pockets for your latchkey and fit it in, just like other nights. He'd been an honest man when he'd left here, and now he'd come back a murderer. A double one.

He hoped she was asleep. He couldn't face her right now, couldn't talk to her even if he tried. He was all in emotionally. She'd find out right away just by looking at his face, by looking in his eyes.

He eased the front door closed, tiptoed to the bedroom, looked in. She was lying there asleep. Poor thing, poor helpless thing, married to a murderer.

He went back, undressed in the outer room. Then he stayed in there. Not even stretched out on top of the sofa, but crouched beside it on the floor, head and arms pillowed against its seat. The drums of terror kept pounding. They kept saying, "What am I gonna do now?"

The sun seemed to shoot up the sky, it got to the top so fast. He opened his eyes and it was all the way up. He went to the door and brought in the paper. It wasn't in the morning papers yet, they were made up too soon after midnight.

He turned around and Pauline had come out, was picking up his things. "All over the floor, never saw a man like you —"

He said, "Don't —" and stabbed his hand toward her, but it was already too late. He'd jammed the bills in so haphazardly the second time, in the bar, that they made a noticeable bulge there in his back pocket. She opened it and took them out, and some of them dribbled onto the floor.

She just stared. "Dick!" She was incredulous, overjoyed. "Not Burroughs? Don't tell me you finally —"

"No!" The name went through him like a red-hot skewer. "I didn't go anywhere near him. He had nothing to do with it!"

She nodded corroboratively. "I thought not, because —"

He wouldn't let her finish. He stepped close to her, took her by both shoulders. "Don't mention his name to me again. I don't want to hear his name again. I got it from someone else."

"Who?"

He knew he'd have to answer her, or she'd suspect something. He swallowed, groped blindly for a name. "Charlie Chalmers," he blurted out.

"But he refused you only last week!"

"Well, he changed his mind." He turned on her tormentedly. "Don't ask me any more questions, Pauline, I can't stand it! I haven't slept all night. There it is, that's all that matters." He took his trousers from her, went into the bathroom to dress. He'd hidden Burroughs' gun the night before in the built-in laundry hamper in there; he wished he'd hidden the money with it. He put the gun back in the pocket where he'd carried it last night. If she touched him there —

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He combed his hair. The drums were a little quieter now, but he knew they'd come back again; this was just the lull before the storm.

He came out again, and she was putting cups on the table. She looked worried now. She sensed that something was wrong. She was afraid to ask him, he could see, maybe afraid of what she'd find out. He couldn't sit here eating, just as though this was any other day. Any minute someone might come here after him.

He passed by the window. Suddenly he stiffened, gripped the curtain. "What's that man doing down there?" She came up behind him. "Standing there talking to the janitor —"

"Why, Dick, what harm is there in that? A dozen people a day stop and chat with —"

He edged back a step behind the frame. "He's looking up at our windows! Did you see that? They both turned and looked up this way! Get back!" His arm swept her around behind him.

"Why should we? We haven't done anything."

"They're coming in the entrance to this wing! They're on their way up here —"

"Dick, why are you acting this way, what's happened?"

"Go in the bedroom and wait there." He was a coward, yes. But there are varieties. At least he wasn't a coward that hid behind a woman's skirts. He prodded her in there ahead of him. Then he gripped her shoulder a minute. "Don't ask any questions. If you love me, stay in here until they go away again."

He closed the door on her frightened face. He cracked the gun. Two left in it. "I can get them both," he thought, "if I'm careful. I've got to."

It was going to happen again.

The jangle of the doorbell battery steeled him. He moved with deadly slowness toward the door, feet flat and firm upon the floor. He picked up the newspaper from the table on his way by, rolled it into a funnel, thrust his hand and the gun down into it. The pressure of his arm against his side was sufficient to keep it furled. It was as though he had just been reading and had carelessly tucked the paper under his arm. It hid the gun effectively as long as he kept it slanting down.

He freed the latch and shifted slowly back with the door, bisected by its edge, the unarmed half of him all that showed. The janitor came into view first, as the gap widened. He was on the outside. The man next to him had a derby hat riding the back of his head, a bristly mustache, was rotating a cigar between his teeth. He looked like — one of those who come after you.

The janitor said with scarcely veiled insolence, "Paine, I've got a man here looking for a flat. I'm going to show him yours, seeing as how it'll be available from today on. Any objections?"

Paine swayed there limply against

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the door like a garment bag hanging on a hook, as they brushed by. "No," he whispered deflatedly. "No, go right ahead."

He held the door open to make sure their descent continued all the way down to the bottom. As soon as he'd closed it, Pauline caught him anxiously by the arm. "Why wouldn't you let me tell them we're able to pay the arrears now and are staying? Why did you squeeze my arm like that when I started to?"

"Because we're not staying, and I don't want them to know we've got the money. I don't want anyone to know. We're getting out of here."

"Dick, what is it? Have you done something you shouldn't?"

"Don't ask me. Listen, if you love me, don't ask any questions. I'm — in a little trouble. I've got to get out of here. Never mind why. If you don't want to come with me, I'll go alone."

"Anywhere you go, I'll go." Her eyes misted. "But can't it be straightened out?"

Two men dead beyond recall. He gave a bitter smile. "No, it can't."

"Is it bad?"

He shut his eyes, took a minute to answer. "It's bad, Pauline. That's all you need to know. That's all I want you to know. I've got to get out of here as fast as I can. From one minute to the next it may be too late. Let's get started now. They'll be here to dispossess us sometime today anyway, that'll be a good excuse. We won't wait, we'll leave now."

She went in to get ready. She took so long doing it he nearly went crazy. She didn't seem to realize how urgent it was. She wasted as much time deciding what to take and what to leave behind as though they were going on a weekend jaunt to the country. He kept going to the bedroom door, urging, "Pauline, hurry! Faster, Pauline!"

She cried a good deal. She was an obedient wife; she didn't ask him any more questions about what the trouble was. She just cried about it without knowing what it was.

He was down on hands and knees beside the window, in the position of a man looking for a collar button under a dresser, when she finally came out with the small bag she'd packed. He turned a stricken face to her. "Too late — I can't leave with you. Someone's already watching the place."

She inclined herself to his level, edged up beside him.

"Look straight over to the other side of the street. See him? He hasn't moved for the past ten minutes. People don't just stand like that for no reason —"

"He may be waiting for someone."

"He is," he murmured somberly. "Me."

"But you can't be sure."

"No, but if I put it to the test by showing myself, it'll be too late by the time I find out. You go by yourself, ahead of me."

"No, if you stay, let me stay with you —"

"I'm not staying, I can't! I'll follow

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you and meet you somewhere. But it'll be easier for us to leave one at a time than both together. I can slip over the roof or go out the basement way. He won't stop you, they're not looking for you. You go now and wait for me. No, I have a better idea. Here's what you do. You get two tickets and get on the train at the downtown terminal without waiting for me —" He was separating some of the money, thrusting it into her reluctant hand while he spoke. "Now listen closely. Two tickets to Montreal —"

An added flicker of dismay showed in her eyes. "We're leaving the country?"

When you've committed murder, you have no country any more. "We have to, Pauline. Now there's an eight o'clock limited for there every night. It leaves the downtown terminal at eight sharp. It stops for five minutes at the station uptown, at twenty after. That's where I'll get on. Make sure you're on it or we'll miss each other. Keep a seat for me next to you in the day coach —"

She clung to him despairingly. "No, no. I'm afraid you won't come. Something'll happen. You'll miss it. If I leave you now I may never see you again. I'll find myself making the trip up there alone, without you —"

He tried to reassure her, pressing her hands between his. "Pauline, I give you my word of honor —" That was no good, he was a murderer now. "Pauline, I swear to you —"

"Here — on this. Take a solemn oath on this, otherwise I won't go." She took out a small carnelian cross she carried in her handbag, attached to a little gold chain — one of the few things they hadn't pawned. She palmed it, pressed the flat of his right hand over it. They looked into each other's eyes with sacramental intensity.

His voice trembled. "I swear nothing will keep me from that train; I'll join you on it no matter what happens, no matter who tries to stop me. Rain or shine, *dead or alive*, I'll meet you aboard it at eight twenty tonight!"

She put it away, their lips brushed briefly but fervently.

"Hurry up now," he urged. "He's still there. Don't look at him on your way past. If he should stop you and ask who you are, give another name —"

He went to the outside door with her, watched her start down the stairs. The last thing she whispered up was: "Dick, be careful for my sake. Don't let anything happen to you between now and tonight."

He went back to the window, crouched down, cheekbones to sill. She came out under him in a minute or two. She knew enough not to look up at their windows, although the impulse must have been strong. The man was still standing over there. He didn't seem to notice her. He even looked off in another direction.

She passed from view behind the building line; their windows were set in on the court that indented it.

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Paine wondered if he'd ever see her again. Sure he would, he had to. He realized that it would be better for her if he didn't. It wasn't fair to enmesh her in his own doom. But he'd sworn an oath, and he meant to keep it.

Two, three minutes ticked by. The cat-and-mouse play continued. He crouched motionless by the window, the other man stood motionless across the street. She must be all the way down at the corner by now. She'd take the bus there, to go downtown. She might have to wait a few minutes for one to come along, she might still be in sight. But if he was going to go after her, accost her, he would have started by now. He wouldn't keep standing there.

Then, as Paine watched, he did start. He looked down that way, threw away something he'd been smoking, began to move purposefully in that direction. There was no mistaking the fact that he was looking *at* or *after* someone, by the intent way he held his head. He passed from sight.

Paine began to breathe hot and fast. "I'll kill him. If he touches her, tries to stop her, I'll kill him right out in the open street in broad daylight." It was still fear, cowardice, that was at work, although it was almost unrecognizable as such by now.

He felt for the gun, left his hand on it, inside the breast of his coat, straightened to his feet, ran out of the flat and down the stairs. He cut across the little set-in paved courtyard at a sprint, flashed out past the sheltering building line, turned down in the direction they had both taken.

Then as the panorama before him registered, he staggered to an abrupt stop, stood taking it in. It offered three component but separate points of interest. He only noticed two at first. One was the bus down at the corner. The front third of it protruded, door open. He caught a glimpse of Pauline's back as she was in the act of stepping in, unaccompanied and unmolested.

The door closed automatically, and it swept across the vista and disappeared at the other side. On the other side of the street, but nearer at hand, the man who had been keeping the long vigil had stopped a second time, was gesticulating angrily to a woman laden with parcels whom he had joined. Both voices were so raised they reached Paine without any trouble.

"A solid half-hour I've been standing there and no one home to let me in!"

"Well, is it my fault you went off without your key? Next time take it with you!"

Nearer at hand still, on Paine's own side of the street, a lounging figure detached itself from the building wall and impinged on his line of vision. The man had been only yards away the whole time, but Paine's eyes had been trained on the distance, he'd failed to notice him until now.

His face suddenly loomed out at Paine. His eyes bored into Paine's with unmistakable intent. He didn't

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look like one of those that come to get you. He acted like it. He thumbed his vest pocket for something, some credential or identification. He said in a soft, slurring voice that held an inflexible command in it, "Just a minute there, buddy. You're name's Paine, ain't it? I want to see you —"

Paine didn't have to give his muscular coordination any signal; it acted for him automatically. He felt his legs carry him back into the shelter of the courtyard in a sort of slithering jump. He was in at the foot of the public stairs before the other man had even rounded the building line. He was in behind his own door before the remorselessly slow but plainly audible tread had started up them.

The man seemed to be coming up after him alone. Didn't he know Paine had a gun? He'd find out. He was up on the landing now. He seemed to know which floor to stop at, which door to come to a halt before. Probably the janitor had told him. Then why hadn't he come sooner? Maybe he'd been waiting for someone to join him, and Paine had upset the plan by showing himself so soon.

Paine realized he'd trapped himself by returning here. He should have gone on up to the roof and over. But the natural instinct of the hunted, whether four-legged or two, is to find a hole, get in out of the open. It was too late now: he was right out there on the other side of the door. Paine tried to keep his harried breathing silent.

To his own ears it grated like sand sifted through a sieve.

He didn't ring the bell and he didn't knock; he tried the knob, in a half-furtive, half-badgering way. That swirl of panic began to churn in Paine again. He couldn't let him get in; he couldn't let him get away, either. He'd only go and bring others back with him.

Paine pointed the muzzle of the gun to the crack of the door, midway between the two hinges. With his other hand he reached out for the catch that controlled the latch, released it.

Now if he wanted to die, he should open this door.

The man had kept on trying the knob. Now the door slipped in past the frame. The crack at the other side widened in accompaniment as it swung around. Paine ran the gun bore up it even with the side of his head.

The crash was thunderous. He fell into the flat, with only his feet and ankles outside.

Paine came out from behind the door, dragged him the rest of the way in, closed it. He stopped, his hands probed here and there. He found a gun, a heftier, more businesslike one than his. He took that. He found a billfold heavy with cash. He took that, too. He fished for the badge.

There wasn't any in the vest pocket he'd seen him reach toward downstairs. There was only a block of cheaply printed cards. "Star Finance Company. Loans. Up to any amount without security."

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So he hadn't been one, after all; he'd evidently been some kind of a loan shark, drawn by the scent of Paine's difficulties.

Three times now in less than twenty-four hours.

Instinctively he knew he was doomed now, if he hadn't before. There wasn't any more of the consternation he had felt the first two times. He kept buying off time with bullets, that was all it was now. And the rate of interest kept going higher, the time limit kept shortening. There wasn't even any time to feel sorry.

Doors had begun opening outside in the hall, voices were calling back and forth. "What was that—a shot?"

"It sounded like in 3-B."

He'd have to get out now, right away, or he'd be trapped in here again. And this time for good. He shifted the body out of the line of vision from outside, buttoned up his jacket, took a deep breath; then he opened the door, stepped out, closed it after him. Each of the other doors was open with somebody peering out from it. They hadn't ganged up yet in the middle of the hall. Most of them were women, anyway. One or two edged timidly back when they saw him emerge.

"It wasn't anything," he said. "I dropped a big clay jug in there just now."

He knew they didn't believe him.

He started down the stairs. At the third step he looked over the side, saw the cop coming up. Somebody had already phoned or sent out word. He reversed, flashed around his own landing, and on up from there.

The cop's voice said, "Stop where you are!" He was coming on fast now. But Paine was going just as fast.

The cop's voice said, "Get inside, all of you! I'm going to shoot!"

Doors began slapping shut like firecrackers. Paine switched over abruptly to the rail and shot first.

The cop jolted, but he grabbed the rail and stayed up. He didn't die as easy as the others. He fired four times before he lost his gun. He missed three times and hit Paine the fourth time.

It went in his chest on the right side, and knocked him across the width of the staircase. It flamed with pain, and then it didn't hurt so much. He found he could get up again. Maybe because he had to. He went back and looked down. The cop had folded over the railing and gone sliding down it as far as the next turn, the way a kid does on a bannister. Only sidewise, on his stomach. Then he dropped off onto the landing, rolled over and lay still, looking up at Paine without seeing him.

Four.

Paine went on up to the roof, but not fast, not easily any more. The steps were like an escalator going the other way, trying to carry him down with them. He went across to the roof of the next flat, and down through that, and came out on the street behind his own. The two buildings were twins, set back-to-back. The prowl

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car was already screeching to a stop, out of sight back there at his own doorway. He could hear it over the roofs, on this side.

He was wet across the hip. Then he was wet as far down as the knee. And he hadn't been hit in those places, so he must be bleeding a lot. He saw a taxi and he waved to it, and it backed up and got him. It hurt getting in. He couldn't answer for a minute when the driver asked him where to. His sock felt sticky under his shoe now, from the blood. He wished he could stop it until eight twenty. He had to meet Pauline on the train, and that was a long time to stay alive.

The driver had taken him off the street and around the corner without waiting for him to be more explicit. He asked him where to a second time.

Paine said, "What time is it?"

"Quarter to six, cap."

Life was awfully short — and awfully sweet. He said, "Take me to the park and drive me around in it." That was the safest thing to do, that was the one place they wouldn't look for you.

He thought, "I've always wanted to drive around in the park. Not go anywhere, just drive around in it slow. I never had the money to do it before."

He had it now. More money than he had time left to spend it.

The bullet must still be in him. His back didn't hurt, so it hadn't come out. Something must have stopped it. The bleeding had let up. He could feel it drying on him. The pain kept trying to pull him over double though.

The driver noticed it, said: "Are you hurt?"

"No, I've got kind of a cramp, that's all."

"Want me to take you to a drug store?"

Paine smiled weakly. "No, I guess I'll let it ride."

Sundown in the park. So peaceful, so prosaic. Long shadows across the winding paths. A belated nursemaid or two pushing a perambulator homeward. A loiterer or two lingering on the benches in the dusk. A little lake, with a rowboat on it — a sailor on shore leave rowing his sweetheart around. A lemonade and popcorn man trundling his wagon home for the day.

Stars were coming out. At times the trees were outlined black against the copper western sky. At times the whole thing blurred and he felt as if he were being carried around in a maelstrom. Each time he fought through and cleared his senses again. He had to make that train.

"Let me know when it gets to be eight o'clock."

"Sure, cap. It's only quarter to seven now."

A groan was torn from Paine as they hit a lumpy spot in the driveway. He tried to keep it low, but the driver must have heard it.

"Still hurts you, huh?" he inquired sympathetically. "You oughta get it fixed up." He began to talk about his own indigestion. "Take me for instance. I'm okay until I eat tamales and root beer. Any time that I eat tamales and root beer —"

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He shut up abruptly. He was staring fixedly into the rear-sight mirror. Paine warily clutched his lapels together over his darkened shirt front. He knew it was too late to do any good.

The driver didn't say anything for a long time. He was thinking it over, and he was a slow thinker. Then finally he suggested off-handedly, "Care to listen to the radio?"

Paine knew what he was out for. He thought, "He wants to see if he can get anything on me over it."

"May as well," the driver urged. "It's thrown in with the fare, won't cost you nothing extra."

"Go ahead," Paine consented. He wanted to see if he could hear anything himself.

It made the pain a little easier to bear, like music always does. "I used to dance, too," Paine thought, listening to the tune, "before I started killing people."

It didn't come over for a long time.

"A city-wide alarm is out for Richard Paine. Paine, who was about to be dispossessed from his flat, shot and killed a finance company employee. Then when Officer Harold Carey answered the alarm, he met the same fate. However, before giving up his life in the performance of his duty, the patrolman succeeded in seriously wounding the desperado. A trail of blood left by the fugitive on the stairs leading up to the roof over which he made good his escape seems to confirm this. He's still at large but probably won't be for long. Watch out for this man, he's dangerous."

"Not if you leave him alone, let him get to that train," Paine thought ruefully. He eyed the suddenly rigid silhouette in front of him. "I'll have to do something about him — now — I guess."

It had come through at a bad time for the driver. Some of the main driveways through the park were heavily trafficked and pretty well lighted. He could have got help from another car. But it happened to come through while they were on a dark, lonely byway with not another machine in sight. Around the next turn the bypass rejoined one of the heavy-traffic arteries. You could hear the hum of traffic from where they were.

"Pull over here," Paine ordered. He'd had the gun out. He was only going to clip him with it, stun him and tie him up until after eight twenty.

You could tell by the way the driver pulled his breath in short that he'd been wise to Paine ever since the news flash, had only been waiting until they got near one of the exits or got a red light. He braked. Then suddenly he bolted out, tried to duck into the underbrush.

Paine had to get him and get him fast, or he'd get word to the park division. They'd cork up the entrances on him. He knew he couldn't get out and go after him. He pointed low, tried to hit him in the foot or leg, just bring him down.

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The driver had tripped over something, gone flat, a moment ahead of the trigger fall. The bullet must have ploughed into his back instead. He was inert when Paine got out to him, but still alive. Eyes open, as though his nerve centers had been paralyzed.

He could hardly stand up himself, but he managed to drag him over to the cab and somehow got him in. He took the cap and put it on his own head.

He could drive — or at least he'd been able to before he was dying. He got under the wheel and took the machine slowly on its way. The sound of the shot must have been lost out in the open, or else mistaken for a backfire; the stream of traffic was rolling obliviously by when he slipped into it unnoticed. He left it again at the earliest opportunity, turned off at the next dark, empty lane that offered itself.

He stopped once more, made his way to the back door, to see how the cabman was. He wanted to help him in some way if he could. Maybe leave him in front of a hospital.

It was too late. The driver's eyes were closed. He was already dead by this time.

Five.

It didn't have any meaning any more. After all, to the dying death is nothing. "I'll see you again in an hour or so," he said.

He got the driver's coat off him and shrouded him with it, to keep the pale gleam of his face from peering up through the gloom of the cab's interior, in case anyone got too close to the window. He was unequal to the task of getting him out again and leaving him behind in the park. The lights of some passing car might have picked him up too soon. And it seemed more fitting to let him rest in his own cab, anyway.

It was ten to eight now. He'd better start for the station. He might be held up by lights on the way, and the train only stopped a few minutes at the uptown station.

He had to rejoin the main stream of traffic to get out of the park. He hugged the outside of the driveway and trundled along. He went off the road several times. Not because he couldn't drive, but because his senses fogged. He pulled himself and the cab out of it each time. "Train, eight twenty," he waved before his mind like a red lantern. But like a spendthrift he was using up years of his life in minutes, and pretty soon he was going to run short.

Once an alarm car passed him, shrieking by, taking a short cut through the park from one side of the city to the other. He wondered if they were after him. He didn't wonder very hard. Nothing mattered much any more. Only eight twenty — train —

He kept folding up slowly over the wheel and each time it touched his chest, the machine would swerve crazily as though it felt the pain, too. Twice, three times, his fenders were grazed, and he heard faint voices

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swearing at him from another world, the world he was leaving behind. He wondered if they'd call him names like that if they knew he was dying.

Another thing: he couldn't maintain a steady flow of pressure on the accelerator. The pressure would die out each time, as when current is failing, and the machine would begin drifting to a stop. This happened just as he was leaving the park, crossing the big circular exit plaza. It was controlled by lights and he stalled on a green out in the middle. There was a cop in control on a platform. The cop shot the whistle out of his own mouth blowing it so hard at him. He nearly flung himself off the platform waving him on.

Paine just sat there, helpless.

The cop was coming over to him, raging like a lion. Paine wasn't afraid because of what the back of his cab held; he was long past that kind of fear. But if this cop did anything to keep him from that eight-twenty train —

He reached down finally, gripped his own leg by the ankle, lifted it an inch or two clear of the floor, let it fall back again, and the cab started. It was ludicrous. But then some of the aspects of death often are.

The cop let him go, only because to have detained him longer would have created a worse traffic snarl than there was already.

He was nearly there now. Just a straight run crosstown, then a short one north. It was good he remembered this, because he couldn't see the street signs any more. Sometimes the buildings seemed to lean over above him as though they were about to topple down on him. Sometimes he seemed to be climbing a steep hill, where he knew there wasn't any. But he knew that was just because he was swaying around in the driver's seat.

The same thing happened again a few blocks farther on, directly in front of a large, swank apartment house, just as the doorman came flying out blowing a whistle. He'd caught hold of Paine's rear door and swung it wide before the latter could stop him, even though the cab was still rolling. Two women in evening dress came hurrying out of the entrance behind him, one in advance of the other.

"No — taken," Paine kept trying to say. He was too weak to make his voice heard, or else they ignored it. And he couldn't push his foot down for a moment.

The foremost one shrieked, "Hurry, Mother. Donald'll never forgive me. I promised him seven thirty —"

She got one foot on the cab doorstep.Then she just stood there transfixed. She must have seen what was inside; it was better lighted here than in the park.

Paine tore the cab away from her, open door and all, left her standing there petrified, out in the middle of the street in her long white satin gown, staring after him. She was too stunned even to scream.

And then he got there at last. He got a momentary respite, too. Things

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cleared a little. Like the lights going up in a theatre when the show is over, before the house darkens for the night.

The uptown station was built-in under a viaduct that carried the overhead tracks across the city streets. He couldn't stop in front of it; no parking was allowed. And there were long lines of cabs on both sides of the no-parking zone. He turned the corner into the little dead-end alley that separated the viaduct from the adjoining buildings. There was a side entrance to the station looking out on it.

Four minutes. It was due in another four minutes. It had already left downtown, was on its way, hurtling somewhere between the two points. He thought, "I better get started. I may have a hard time making it." He wondered if he could stand up at all.

He just wanted to stay where he was and let eternity wash over him.

Two minutes. It was coming in overhead, he could hear it rumbling and ticking along the steel viaduct, then sighing to a long-drawn-out stop.

That sidewalk looked awfully wide, from the cab door to the station entrance. He brought up the last dregs of vitality in him, broke away from the cab, started out, zigzagging and going down lower at the knees every minute. The station door helped pull him up straight again. He got into the waiting room, and it was so big he knew he'd never be able to cross it. One minute left. So near and yet so far.

The starter was calling it already. "Montreal express — eight twenty! — Pittsfield, Burlington, Rouse's Point, Montre-yall! Bo-o-oard!"

There were rows of lengthwise benches at hand and they helped him bridge the otherwise insuperable length of the waiting room. He dropped into the outside seat in the first row, pulled himself together a little, scrambled five seats over, toppled into that; repeated the process until he was within reach of the ticket barrier. But time was going, the train was going, life was going fast.

Forty-five seconds left. The last dilatory passengers had already gone up. There were two ways of getting up, a long flight of stairs and an escalator.

He wavered toward the escalator, made it. He wouldn't have been able to get by the ticket taker but for his hackman's cap — an eventuality he and Pauline hadn't foreseen.

"Just meeting a party," he mumbled almost unintelligibly, and the slow treadmill started to carry him up.

A whistle blew upstairs on the track platform. Axles and wheel-bases gave a preliminary creak of motion.

It was all he could do to keep his feet even on the escalator. There wasn't anyone in back of him, and if he once went over he was going to go plunging all the way down to the bottom of the long chute. He dug his nails into the ascending hand-belts at both sides, hung on like grim life.

There was a hubbub starting up outside on the street somewhere. He

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could hear a cop's whistle blowing frenziedly.

A voice shouted: "Which way'd he go?"

Another answered: "I seen him go in the station."

They'd at last found what was in the cab.

A moment after the descending waiting-room ceiling had cut off his view, he heard a spate of running feet come surging in down there from all directions. But he had no time to think of that now. He was out on the open platform upstairs at last. Cars were skimming silkily by. A vestibule-door was coming, with a conductor just lifting himself into it. Paine went toward it, body low, one arm straight out like in a fascist salute.

He gave a wordless cry. The conductor turned, saw him. There was a tug, and he was suddenly sprawled inside on the vestibule floor. The conductor gave him a scathing look, pulled the folding steps in after him, slammed the door.

Too late, a cop, a couple of redcaps, a couple of taxi drivers, came spilling out of the escalator shed. He could hear them yelling a car-length back. The trainmen back there wouldn't open the doors. Suddenly the long, lighted platform snuffed out and the station was gone.

They probably didn't think they'd lost him, but they had. Sure, they'd phone ahead, they'd stop the train to have him taken off at Harmon, where it changed from electricity to coal power. But they wouldn't get him. He wouldn't be on it. Just his body.

Each man knows when he's going to die; he knew he wouldn't even live for five minutes.

He went staggering down a long, brightly lighted aisle. He could hardly see their faces any more. But she'd know him; it'd be all right. The aisle ended, and he had to cross another vestibule. He fell down on his knees, for lack of seat backs to support himself by.

He squirmed up again somehow, got into the next car.

Another long, lighted aisle, miles of it.

He was nearly at the end, he could see another vestibule coming. Or maybe that was the door to eternity. Suddenly, from the last seat of all, a hand darted out and claimed him, and there was Pauline's face looking anxiously up at him. He twisted like a wrung-out dishcloth and dropped into the empty outside seat beside her.

"You were going to pass right by," she whispered.

"I couldn't see you clearly, the lights are flickering so."

She looked up at them in surprise, as though for her they were steady.

"I kept my word," he breathed. "I made the train. But oh, I'm tired — and now I'm going to sleep." He started to slip over sidewise toward her. His head dropped onto her lap.

She had been holding her handbag on it, and his fall displaced it. It dropped to the floor, opened, and everything in it spilled out around her feet.

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His glazing eyes opened for one last time and centered feebly on the little packet of bills, with a rubber band around them, that had rolled out with everything else.

"Pauline, all that money — where'd you get that much? I only gave you enough to buy the train tickets —"

"Burroughs gave it to me. It's the two hundred and fifty we were talking about for so long. I knew in the end you'd never go near him and ask for it, so I went to him myself — last night right after you left the house. He handed it over willingly, without a word. I tried to tell you that this morning, but you wouldn't let me mention his name . . ."

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WINNER OF A FOURTH PRIZE: MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD

One of the most interesting — and significant — things we can tell you about "Beyond the Sea of Death" is that when the author first sent us the manuscript, she wrote: "I never worked on a mystery story so long in my life"; and when we asked Miss deFord to explain, she put it this way: "I believe the reason I took so long was that it is primarily not a murder story but a story. *I had to let the people come alive before I could write about them."*

Therein lies one of the brightest hopes for the future: that detective-story writers are beginning to think first in terms of people, and then in terms of plot — first in terms of character, and then in terms of clues — first in terms of realism, and then in terms of ratiocination. The detective story, as a genre, although "born, like Athena from the head of Zeus, fully grown and armed to the teeth," has barely scratched the surface of its potentialities: it has new worlds to conquer, and in terms of people, character, and realism it will yet make a contribution to literature not dreamt of in our philosophy . . .

BEYOND THE SEA OF DEATH

by MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD

PROBABLY everybody has forgotten the Renford case by now, and yet I suppose if all the words written about it in its time were made into a book, the volume would be bigger than an unabridged dictionary. I wrote plenty of them myself. I covered the case from the beginning, and for some reason Sophie Renford took a fancy to me — perhaps she realized that what I was interested in primarily was not the lurid details of a murder committed by a rich young woman, but the emotional and psychological reasons for the murder. I saw her often before the trial, and once in a while I used to visit her afterwards — not for copy, but just because I thought her interesting and pathetic, even tragic — in the place to which they sent her.

They used to say you "couldn't convict a million dollars." That's not strictly true (every newspaper man can give you dozens of instances to the contrary), but of course Sophie Renford did have the advantage of being able to afford the most expensive lawyers and her pick of psychiatrists. The result was that instead of being sent to spend the rest of her life in the State prison for women, she

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spent it in an institution that was more like a country club than a hospital, except that the windows were barred and the guests couldn't leave without a court order. In my opinion she was no more insane than you or I; but she certainly was a misfit in the world of today, and I wonder if she wasn't happier there — or at least, less unhappy — than she could ever have been in an environment that forced her to compete on terms nature had not equipped her to meet.

There was never much mystery about the case. The only puzzles were: why had she killed the particular person she did kill, and what was her motive? The rest was legal technicalities — the question of premeditation, the facts establishing her guilt, the whole tangled, unlikely story leading up to the crime. I don't think there ever was a murder committed which depended so wholly on the psychological make-up of the person committing it.

She was old "Bull" Renford's daughter — that was her first handicap. Renford never was in the class with the really big industrialists of his time, but he'd made and lost two or three sizable fortunes, and at his death, when his only child was twenty-two, he left between three and four million dollars — all of it to Sophie, except for the comfortable little annuity to Minnie Briggs and a few other minor bequests to servants, and so forth. It wasn't enough to make a really important heiress of her, but it was enough to bring the lesser hyenas.

I might as well acknowledge right away that Sophie Renford could never have been the heroine of a novel — she was no beauty, and by conventional standards she wasn't even pretty. She had her father's long, lanky frame, she was too thin, and she knew and cared too little about dress and social graces and the other ways in which other girls camouflage the ill favor of nature. To me she always seemed appealing, with her pale skin, her mop of soft, fine brown hair, and her big gray questioning eyes. But I can see very well why when "Bull" spent his money, via a decayed society lady who did such things for hire, to have her brought out and to give her not one, but three social seasons, she was completely lost in the throng. She was too shy, too timid, too awkward. She had never gone to school in her life, but had had all her education from Minnie Briggs at home, and she read too much. She had no close girl friends, and few acquaintances beyond the most casual ones. She might almost have spent her childhood in a convent. Since her mother had died when she was born, the only people she knew well were her father and Minnie Briggs, and the servants in the big, ugly mausoleum "Bull" Renford had built for his bride.

By Sophie's bad luck (which began with the old-fashioned name they gave her, for her deceased grandmother), on neither side did she have living relatives nearer than second or third cousins, who gave her no heed — the Renford ones, in fact, if they

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existed, were all somewhere in Ireland. She was a girl with a great need and capacity for loving someone, and there was no one for her to love. If "Bull" Renford cared for anyone besides himself and his dead wife, it was his daughter, but the only emotion he could inspire in a shrinking child was fear. Minnie Briggs had come as Sophie's nurse when the girl was three, had been transformed into a governess, and after Sophie's début had stayed on as companion and chaperon, but it would as soon have occurred to Sophie to love the accustomed furniture of her home as to love the dumpy little spinster, with her crisp speech, her brisk manners, her keen, practical mind. It would have amazed the girl beyond speech to learn that she was the center of Minnie Briggs's world, that "Briggsy" cherished her with a maternal passion as selfless as it was inarticulate.

The inevitable happened, of course. Three months after her father died, Sophie eloped with the chauffeur. He was young, unmarried, and personable enough, with a little mustache and soulful brown eyes; and she had inherited more than three million dollars. There was nothing to do about it; she was of age and her own mistress. Minnie Briggs, informed suddenly that her charge was now Mrs. Vincent Mason, could only be thankful that the bridal couple would continue to live in the old house and that she was expected to stay on as always. All she could do was to see to it that the new chauffeur was fifty years old, with a squint and five children, and to stand by for when she would be needed.

The marriage lasted two years. Sophie learned within a month that Vincent drank too much — he had got drunk only on his days off when he was the chauffeur; that he had a weakness for gambling and always lost; and that he had a weakness for girls and always won. She had her pride, and she stuck it out even past the time when he answered her tears with a blow across the face and a slammed door. But when, in the presence of Minnie Briggs, he yelled: "What the hell do you think I married you for? I wouldn't have walked across the street for you except for your money!" there was no use in pretending any longer. Vincent was bought off for $50,000, cash, in return for an uncontested divorce.

The effect on Sophie of this disillusionment was very bad. For one thing, she was now possessed of a fixed idea that no man on earth would ever want her for herself alone; that any man's interest in her would necessarily be financial, once he knew she was rich. For another, she became obsessed with the fear that Mason — who, after all, had profited pretty well by his two years as her husband — might come back some day and attack her. Her infatuation with him had turned into an unreasoning terror. She drove the servants wild with her insistence that the house be locked and double-locked nightly; for a while she would not stir abroad without Minnie Briggs at her side; and she even bought a

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silly, vicious little pearl-handled revolver, which she kept, loaded, under her pillow.

Gradually this baseless fear died down, since Mason made no attempt whatever to approach her. As a matter of fact, she never saw him again. He was drafted in the war, sent overseas, and was killed in Italy.

Another year went by, and Sophie Renford — she had taken back her maiden name — was, so far as she would ever be, her normal self once more. She was just twenty-five. She was bored and lonely and emotionally starved, and it was Spring. Minnie Briggs watched and worried and said nothing. Sophie's days were full of little manufactured occupations, strained and formal social engagements, vain attempts to lose herself in books and music and half-hearted hobbies. With the few men she met, she was awkward and brusque; she still retained her settled belief that if a man showed an interest in her it would be only because of her money. No man did.

Minnie Briggs subscribed to a literary magazine which featured a department of personal advertisements. People, in what they hoped was quaint or witty language, offered houses for sale or rent, or asked for jobs, or advocated causes. Mostly what they advertised for was correspondents; they announced their interests and yearned for cheerful or understanding or stimulating letters from someone (usually of the opposite sex) with similar outlooks.

One day, glancing through this department, Minnie Briggs noticed that one of the notices had been cut from it. Alert and apprehensive, she bought another copy of the magazine. The notice read: "Gringo engineer, marooned in South America, youngish, unwed, interested poetry, music, philosophy, longs for letters from sympathetic Nordamericana to remind him of home. Will like-minded miss reply?" The address was a box number in the magazine.

Being a natural worrier, Minnie Briggs worried for a while, though this seemed harmless enough and perhaps even beneficial. When several months went by and no letters ever arrived bearing a South American stamp, she forgot it.

She had forgotten also Sophie's obsession about being a poor little rich girl. Sophie had written, all right. But though she had no illusion that her name might mean anything to her correspondent — after all, it was not Rockefeller or Astor — she did fear that her address might. If "home," to the engineer, happened to be her own city, then he would recognize very well that no one could live where she did who was not wealthy. She rented a post-office box. To it, a month later, came the first letter from Bolivia, and others followed thick and fast.

The engineer's name was Keith Hathaway. The address he gave was one in La Paz, in care of one Tomás Gonsalvez; he explained that the tin mine where he was chief engineer was high in the Andes, and that he got his

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mail at a Bolivian friend's home in the city, where he spent his weekends and holidays. Gonsalvez, he said, was a lawyer, married to a girl from the United States and with a family of youngsters who all called him Uncle Keith. In time Sophie felt well acquainted by proxy with Tomás and Sylvia and the kids. Keith — they were on first-name terms with the third letter — was on his first big job; he was only four years out of college. Even at home, he ("like myself," Sophie answered him wistfully) had been a lonely chap, an orphan without brothers or sisters, having to work his way while others played, and in any case drawn to interests that bored most of the people he knew.

"Your description of yourself sounds as if you had written it about me instead," she wrote, not altogether accurately. Without actually saying so, she gave the impression that she too had struggled with poverty as well as loneliness. "Since my father died," she told him, "I have lived with an elderly friend." Minnie Briggs, who was not yet fifty, would have been outraged. In her mind's eye Sophie saw herself helping with the housework, perhaps preparing herself somehow to earn a living in some laborious but genteel way. "The friend I live with is not very strong," she wrote — Briggsy, who had never known an ache or pain in her robust life! — and the implication was that she was a sort of half-employee, half-dependent, for her board and room. The post-office box she explained away by saying: "My friend subscribes to a lot of magazines, and as the boxes in the building where we have our little apartment are so small, she rented this as more convenient, and I come downtown every day to get our mail."

She thought of everything. Keith wanted her picture — he sent her a snapshot, postcard size, showing a tall blond, rangy and not too handsome, but with a smile which twisted her heart — and she forthwith bought a camera and pursued a new hobby fervently until, out of the dozens of photographs she had Minnie Briggs take of her, she found one which, enlarged, showed her in the most advantageous light. "I'm afraid you'll think I'm not very pretty," she wrote timidly. "You're just what I had dreamed you might be," Keith answered. "I hate the insipid, Hollywoodish, pin-up beauties most men admire. Your picture is lovely, and I carry it in my wallet next to the picture of my mother."

Sophie could not sleep all that night.

Four months after his first letter Keith announced that he was coming home on six weeks' leave. " 'Home,' by this time," he wrote, "means where you are — perhaps you've guessed that by now? I am flying up on the first of the month, and shall be with you just three weeks from today. How soon shall I see you? Do you realize that you have never given me your home address? I can't very well meet you in the post office, can I? Write me air mail at once to tell me

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where I can phone you as soon as I arrive."

Sophie thought fast. Perhaps after they had gone around together a few times, if she could once be thoroughly sure he liked her ("liked" was the word she used) only for herself, she could risk telling him the truth. But she could not ask him to the big house before that — if only because that would reveal her little half-truths and evasions. She thought of renting a tiny apartment somewhere in a good, but not too good, neighborhood. But even she knew that one did not find apartments in a hurry nowadays, and even if she could do so, where would the "elderly friend" be? Finally she wrote:

"It is so wonderful that you are coming, Keith. I can scarcely believe it. Of course I want to see as much of you as I can. There is only one difficulty. My friend with whom I live has been taken very ill. She has a trained nurse and I can get away, but I can't have anyone come to the apartment till she is better. Let me know right away where you'll be staying, and I'll phone you there as soon as you've arrived."

That was the way they arranged it. They had dinner together his first night, and all evening Sophie walked in a radiant cloud. If she had made this man to specification, he could not have been more the ideal of her lifelong dreams. And Keith — she knew it instinctively — felt the same way about her.

She came to with a start when — the restaurant was ready to close — the moment arrived when he must take her home. But she had made her arrangements; Sophie was not the daughter of shrewd "Bull" Renford for nothing. She had spotted just the right apartment house — the exact kind of place she ought to have lived in, and with an open door to the lobby so she would not need a key. Before Keith got to town she had interviewed the night switchboard operator. "I don't want this man to know my real address," she had said. The girl would think she was a married woman carrying on an affair, but what did that matter? A bill had passed. Keith left her there, and after he was gone she called another taxi and went home. He would not phone her, for she would never leave him without another appointment.

For five days they were together from morning to night. He rented a car and they drove to the country, eating at quaint roadhouses he discovered. They went together to museums and parks and libraries. It was all a dream come true. On the fifth evening he asked her to marry him. The face she turned to him was shining with trust and joy.

Her confession, when she made it, was only touching. Keith loved her, thinking her penniless. Now, when she acknowledged a fortune, what did it matter? "You foolish child!" he said fondly. "The only way it could possibly concern me is to make sure that when we are married I can never touch a cent of your money. It's *you*

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I care about, sweetheart. How could you ever have imagined anything else?"

"Because —" This was harder, but it had to be done. "Keith, I was married before."

"What?" He was taken aback.

"It was a stupid thing. He never loved me and I never really loved him. We were divorced, and he died in the war. But when I realized that he had married me for my money and for nothing else, it did something to me. I felt — I felt that if I ever fell in love and the man knew I had money, I could never be sure it wasn't — wasn't the same thing over again, and —"

"Darling! My poor little girl!" He gathered her in his arms and held her until her sobs were quieted. He closed her hand over a cameo ring. "It isn't worth much," he said, "but it was my mother's. You're mine now. I'll spend the rest of my life making up to you for that brute."

So at last she could take Keith home and tell Briggsy.

Minnie Briggs liked Keith, as much as she would have liked any man who was going to marry her child. She was unhappy when she learned their plans — that Keith was to go back to Bolivia and send for Sophie as soon as he had found a place for them to live in. She wondered, perhaps, what was to become of her after all these years. Was she supposed to go to Bolivia too, or was she to be left alone as caretaker of the big house, or was the house to be sold and she to carve out a new life for herself on the annuity her employer had left her? But it was selfish even to think of herself. A wife's place was with her husband, and an engineer's wife must learn to live wherever her husband's work took him. She wished them happiness with a full heart. In fact, badly as she would miss Sophie, the news was a relief; the Vincent Mason episode had shaken her badly. In spite of the manner of their meeting, from which such unpleasant things might have sprung, everything was going to turn out all right.

When Keith Hathaway left to return to Bolivia, Minnie Briggs too kissed him goodbye. Neither of them went to the airport with him; he begged them not to — he could not bear to fly away and look back on Sophie standing there without him. It might be months before they could both attend to all the practical problems and he could send for her. "I suppose I'm one of the problems," thought Minnie Briggs ruefully.

Now Keith's letters were all full of plans and progress. Gonsalvez had heard of a suitable house in La Paz which would be for sale as soon as its owner, the representative of an English company, should be transferred to Chile. Tomás and Sylvia and the children were all agog to meet her — he was teaching the kids to refer to her as Aunt Sophie. Sylvia would find servants for her. Keith would be able to arrange for two weeks off; he would meet her plane and they would be married at the United States consu-

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late. He would telephone her when the date could be set, giving her plenty of time for reservations and passport and packing, and for the disposition of her own affairs.

"And now, enough of all that — we have more important things to talk about — namely, how I long every hour for the day when my darling —"

Sophie kissed the letter.

She and Minnie Briggs, a week later, sat at breakfast, when Mildred brought in the mail. There was a letter with the familiar Bolivian stamp, but not in Keith's handwriting. Sophie looked at the envelope, puzzled, for a minute. She tore it open and glanced at the signature.

"Oh, how nice!" she cried. "It is from Tomás Gonsalvez. How good of him to write me himself!"

Then she read the first paragraph. Minnie Briggs heard a choking sound and jumped to her feet. Sophie, as white as her napkin, lay sprawled across her place at table.

"My dear, dear Miss Renford, I have for you shocking news. I dared not break it by wire or telephone. Yesterday was an accident at the mine. A charge blew prematurely where our friend Keith Hathaway was standing nearby. It was instant death, he did not ever realize, he was blown into a thousand pieces, there was not found enough to —"

It was a dreadful time. Sophie Renford came out of it a silent, apathetic creature who had to be coaxed to eat, who seldom slept, who hardly ever spoke and never smiled. She clung to Minnie Briggs, she read Keith's letters over and over, she spent hours gazing in silence at the only picture she had of him. It was Minnie Briggs who cried. Also, in a sudden frightened thought, she searched for the revolver Sophie had bought when she was afraid of Vincent Mason. She could not find it.

Sophie came to her with one of the letters — one of the last ones.

"Look," she said in a dull voice without inflection, "he had a premonition. Now I understand."

He had written: "Do you know those lovely lines of Christina Rossetti's, sweetheart? — 'Beyond the sea of death Love lies for ever, yesterday, today.' Beyond the real sea that separates us for a while, lies my love for you and yours for me, and when some day we must part, then beyond that sea too my love will lie."

"He knew. He felt it," said the timbreless voice. Then Sophie took the letter quietly away. When she lay at night, sleepless, in her bed, she heard it over and over: "Beyond the sea of death Love lies."

The year died too, and a new one was born. Sophie went through the motions. Dutifully she forced herself to read, to attend concerts and plays and lectures, to serve on committees and sponsor dinners for charitable and patriotic causes. In the evenings when she was at home she and Minnie Briggs sat together, each with a book or magazine or newspaper, like two old ladies settled down for good. She was just twenty-six.

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She glanced uninterestedly at the account of the opening of a new child center, reported in the evening paper. Suddenly, involuntarily, she screamed.

Minnie Briggs sprang to her feet, her heart fluttering.

"Briggsy!" Sophie could only gasp; her trembling finger pointed out an advertisement printed below the story. Minnie Briggs took the paper in hands that shook.

There they were, the very words.

BEYOND THE SEA OF DEATH
What lies beyond that sea we all must cross?
Do those who have crossed before us still live?
Is LOVE immortal?
Hear
SWAMI AVRANYAKANANDA
Gold Ballroom, Imperial Hotel
Wednesday, 8:30 P.M.
Tickets $2.50

"What a ghastly coincidence! You poor child!"

"Coincidence?" Sophie's eyes glittered. "It's not — it's a message — I feel it. It's a message from Keith — he inspired this man to use that very phrase of his letter. I'm going, Briggsy — I'm going to find out what he knows."

"Then I'm going with you. I won't let you go alone."

If you had asked Minnie Briggs whether she believed in survival after death, she would of course have answered yes. But she had an instinctive distrust of the occult or the mystical. She expected Swami Avranyakananda to be a fake — probably not even a Hindu — and as she listened to him on Wednesday evening she was profoundly convinced that she was right on both counts. To her mind he uttered only vague generalities without meaning. The price he had set on his lecture brought out for the most part only those who were at home in the Gold Ballroom, and who could afford what was undoubtedly going to be his whopping fee for the private interviews he offered on later days in the office he had taken in a good residential section of the city. He was canny and self-protecting, she could see that.

"I wish it understood," he announced in an incisive tone quite different from the mellow voice of the rest of his lecture, "that I do not tell fortunes, as the phrase goes — that is quite against the law. This is my religion, and I receive communicants, not clients. All I can promise is to give any of you who seek it what I have learned from those who have crossed that sea of death — perhaps from your own dear ones who have gone before — and to render what counsel and comfort I have drawn from them to help you through your bereavement and your difficulties."

Well, Minnie Briggs was certainly not going to be one of the Swami's "communicants"; but she was unsurprised, if uneasy, to see Sophie among the first to go forward after the lecture to make an appointment. Most of those clustering around

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Avranyakananda, she noticed, were women — women in mink coats and diamond earrings. She sighed. After all, if it brought any consolation to Sophie —

Consolation was not exactly the word. Sophie came back from her first interview in a fever.

"Briggsy, it was — it was incredible. He told me things — he knew things *nobody* knew but Keith and me. He told me places we had gone together, and what we said. He told me whole sentences from his letters — letters I have right here, that no one has ever seen but me — and from mine to him. He knew little things, like what I wore on such-and-such a day, or what the weather was like, or about that tiny mole Keith had at the corner of his mouth. Briggsy, it's true! It's what Christina Rossetti said — 'Beyond the sea of death Love lies.' Love never dies — there isn't any death!"

Minnie Briggs looked at her charge in silence. Something deeper than skepticism, some warning akin to fear, stirred in her heart. But above all she must not antagonize Sophie and drive her into secrecy; she shook her head at last and said: "It is very strange. Will you be seeing this man again?"

"Oh, yes, as long as he's here. He stays a month or six weeks in each place, then he goes on to another city. It is his mission; he has spent years carrying these messages of consolation to people who have lost somebody they loved. He must be the greatest medium who ever lived. I am to go three times a week until he leaves. He says he has much, much more to tell me — things Keith has asked him to pass on to me. Why, he even knew my name, and Keith's, though I didn't give him either one when I made the appointment or when I went there."

Minnie Briggs bit her tongue on the natural retort. Sophie had no one else on earth to look after her interests; her companion must become her watchdog. She dared not even inquire how much the Swami was getting for these thrice-weekly interviews.

She must, she told herself, be fair; she must discount her natural dislike of such goings-on. Perhaps the dead really did survive in some immaterial way, perhaps they could communicate with people tuned, as it were, to hear their voices. But even if this were so, she could not bring herself to think of the Swami Avranyakananda as one of these gifted recipients. The whole set-up was too obviously phony. She wanted very badly to consult someone, to ask for advice — if she could only have done so without betraying Sophie's confidence.

She felt this even more strongly as the days went on and Sophie became wholly absorbed in her preoccupation with the Swami and his continuing messages from Keith Hathaway. Sophie was living in a nebulous world of visions. "Morbid" was the word Minnie Briggs used to herself. But she kept on encouraging Sophie to talk, while she wracked her brains in vain to find some way of protecting her.

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One day Sophie came home with her pale cheeks pink with excitement, her gray eyes burning.

"Did something unusual happen today, dear?" Minnie Briggs asked gently.

"Briggsy." Sophie's voice was exultant. "I am going to be allowed to help."

"To help?"

"In the Swami's work — in his mission. He said he hadn't told me before, because it isn't the money that matters — it's the spirit, and he wasn't sure I was worthy. But last night Keith came to him and asked him to let me be the one, as an intermediary for him and to prove our love — that's just the way Keith put it. I am to dedicate myself to the great work, and he will be dedicated with me.

"The Swami said he wants me to think it over very carefully first, because on this plane it is a sacrifice. But I know now I am going to do it, though he won't let me give him my final decision until a week from today. He's leaving the city the week after that."

"You mean — he wants you to go with him?" Minnie Briggs felt her fingertips and lips grow cold.

Sophie laughed — when had she last heard the child laugh?

"Oh, no," she said. "You'll still have me on your hands, Briggsy — maybe more than ever. It's this. For many years, ever since he started his work, the Swami has dreamed of a great central Temple, a place where, instead of traveling to and fro forever, he could stay and have people come to him for his wonderful messages. It must be in this country, he says — perhaps in California — for America is the only hope of a new world, and it is here that the future is to be established. He showed me the plans — a beautiful central building, with rest-houses and gardens running down to the ocean. It will be a place of spiritual healing for the whole country — for the whole world."

"I see." Minnie Briggs struggled to keep the coldness out of her voice. "And what is your part to be?"

"Why," said Sophie, surprised, "I'm to put up the money for it, of course. Don't look at me like that, Briggsy — I'm my father's daughter, you know, after all. The Swami explained to me very carefully that eventually the place will pay for itself, from the pilgrims' offerings. It is just a loan for a few years — an investment. But it isn't something he'd let anybody do that had the money and wanted to give it to him; he has had thousands and thousands of men and women come to him, many of them wealthier than I, but he couldn't let them help. It had to be somebody with a truly dedicated spirit — and because of Keith, he has chosen me."

"But Sophie — does this mean that you would have to break into your capital?"

"It would take about all I possess," said Sophie calmly. "But does that matter? What good has my money been to me, Briggsy?" Her voice was

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bitter. "All it has brought me is that dreadful experience with Vincent. If I hadn't taken precautions, it might even have lost me Keith and his love. What could I do better with it than give it, for a time or forever if need be, to the only thing that makes me care any more whether I live or die?"

"Have you thought how you could get along, Sophie? You've never been trained to earn your living."

"I'll keep something out — I'm not telling you or anybody exactly how much I'm giving. It is a secret between Keith and me, with only the Swami having to know because he is Keith's interpreter. You have your money from father; you can manage very well. Perhaps we can find a little place together after I sell this house. I've always hated it.

"There's no use your saying a word, Briggsy. My mind's made up. I'm a grown woman, and my property is my own and I can do what I like with it. This is what I want to do."

"I'm not saying anything," answered Minnie Briggs faintly.

She lay awake that night wondering what to do.

It didn't really matter very much if Sophie did give up her fortune — though she would probably find life much more uncomfortable than she had any inkling of now. It was true, she could dispose of her property in any way she saw fit. If she had lost it through speculation or in a depression she would have had to make the best of it, and Minnie Briggs would have stood by, as she was prepared to do in this crisis.

But deeply, instinctively, the companion felt that somehow a crime was being committed against her charge. Any lawyer, any man of business, if Sophie Renford had gone to him, would have felt the same way. This so-called Swami Avranyakananda was a crook; Minnie Briggs felt it in her very bones.

She could not go to the police — there was no evidence, there was even, so far, no overt act. In any case, she could not play the traitor thus to the girl she had guarded and loved for twenty-three years. But though she had no clue to the mystery, she knew there was chicanery about. Somehow the Swami had gained the information which had so impressed Sophie — and not, she was sure, from the dead. Somehow he was using it to mulct Sophie Renford of her fortune.

She thought about employing a private detective, but again she shrank from exposing Sophie's most private secrets to a stranger. For the same reason she could not talk to Sophie's banker, or to her stockbroker, or to the firm which had always handled the Renford legal affairs. There was nobody to depend on but herself. She herself must ferret out the truth, and that before the week was up and Sophie had set things in motion.

How could she do it, with no experience in such matters, no knowledge of the art of spying? Her first impulse, to present herself also, under another name, at the Swami's office

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she rejected; all she could gain would be a lot of irrelevant nonsense about some non-existent deceased relative. She herself would never be "chosen to help in the great work." But she was certain, though without any proof, that Sophie was not the only one — though of course she thought she was — to be so "chosen."

Sophie's next appointment with the Swami was two days off. The next morning she left the house with a luncheon engagement and a committee meeting ahead. Minnie Briggs was free to reconnoitre.

The Swami had established himself in a first-floor apartment of a house in a good neighborhood. The room he used as its office — its big window was discreetly curtained to the top — had probably been a beauty parlor or a lending library previously. It was entered from the lobby, and his name was on a small, gilt-lettered card on the door, with the words beneath: *By appointment only. Please ring.*

Minnie Briggs did not ring. Across the street was a small square, where nurses walked with baby carriages and children played. She crossed and took a seat on a bench near some bushes, from which she could watch the comings and goings in the apartment house. She had no idea as yet what she could do, but this was as good a place as any in which to make up her mind.

She sat there for three hours. Many people, men and women both, entered and left the building. Some, undoubtedly, were residents. There were even a few women with shopping bags, though in general it was the kind of place where the groceries are delivered at the tradesmen's entrance. It was impossible, without being in the lobby itself, to know who entered the Swami's office, though by observing each entrant carefully and then noting when he or she departed, she was pretty sure of at least three, two women and a man. The man walked away slowly, the two women entered cars parked at the curb, and that was that. She gave up and went home.

The next day Sophie herself had an appointment, and Minnie Briggs stayed away lest she be seen. But as soon as Sophie had left the house on the day following to do some shopping, Minnie Briggs took up her vigil again.

This time she noted particularly a young but very plump woman in deep mourning. She was a noticeable figure, and especially so because when she left the house she was weeping uncontrollably. She walked away, struggling to suppress her tears, and Minnie Briggs left the park and followed her path on the opposite side of the street.

The woman turned the corner, wiped her eyes once more, and hailed a cruising taxi. It was apparent from a glance at her clothes that she must have had a car of her own somewhere; probably it was driven by a chauffeur and she did not want him to know where she had been. Minnie Briggs thought wildly of finding another taxi and following; but no other was in sight.

It was two days later that, from her

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park bench, she saw the heavy girl in mourning again. This time she drove up in a taxi — she was gaining confidence; the first time she must have dismissed her cab around the corner — and an hour later she emerged, again in tears. Minnie Briggs stood up, prepared to follow her once more, and determined this time to speak to her. In two more days Sophie would be telling the Swami she was ready to turn over the bulk of her fortune to him; something, Minnie Briggs thought desperately, must be done at once.

Her heart turned a flipflop. The woman, instead of going down the street, was crossing directly to the little square. Perhaps she had been embarrassed, the other time, because the taxi driver had noticed she had been weeping, and wanted to regain control of herself before she took a cab. Minnie Briggs darted, swiftly for so dumpy a figure as hers, behind the bushes, which just concealed her. The woman peered about through her tears for a secluded bench, and sat down. There, with no one to watch her, she sobbed unrestrainedly into a lace handkerchief.

Very quietly, so as not to alarm her, Minnie Briggs approached. She had not been for nearly a quarter-century the companion of a timid, excitable girl for nothing. She sat down on the other end of the bench, the picture, in spite of her spinsterhood, of a kind, understanding, sympathetic mother, and she said gently: "My dear, can I help you?"

The young woman uncovered one moist blue eye and gazed at her doubtfully. What she saw seemed to reassure her. She scrubbed hastily at a round, flushed face, sniffed, and essayed a trembling smile.

"I'm perfectly all right, thank you," she said. "I'm just — I'm just crying because I'm so happy!"

Minnie Briggs smiled her nicest smile.

"How lovely!" she answered. "I know just how you feel. When I first went to the Swami I wanted to cry for joy too — it was such a blessed miracle to know that my dear husband could speak to me from a better world than this."

The girl jumped.

"You mean the Swami — him over there?"

She had guessed correctly; this plump young lady wasn't very bright.

"Of course. I must have seen you before, my dear. You were at his lecture in the Imperial Hotel, weren't you?"

"Why, of course! I must have seen you too. Oh — isn't he *wonderful?*"

"Indeed he is. I must have had my interview today just before yours. I was sitting here thinking over quietly what he told me."

"My heart was just *broken,*" confided the chubby young woman. She opened her alligator handbag and brought out a compact and a lipstick. "I just felt I wanted to die like Hubert. And then when the Swami told me things *nobody* ever knew — all sorts of private things — and I never

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even told him my name or anything about myself — why, he even could tell me where we used to go together, and what we had for dinner in a particular place —"

"Your husband?" asked Minnie Briggs softly. She moved nearer.

"My fiancé." The girl's face twisted again, but she went on fixing her lips. "Oh, he was such a lovely man! We were going to be married as soon as he could find the right place for me, where he had to work. He was an engineer, down in South America."

Minnie Briggs gasped and strove to keep her teeth from chattering. The young woman, all barriers down, babbled on.

"And then there was this awful accident — he — he was blown to pieces; something exploded too soon. A friend of his wrote me the letter. It was a terrible shock — I was sick for weeks. My sister saw the Swami's notice and made me go to the lecture — I didn't want to go anywhere. She made me go the first time to see him in private, too. Oh, I'm so glad I did! My sister's married, she has her own life to lead and she couldn't help me, but she's all I had after Hubert went. She was so worried about me, our parents are both dead, and she was so glad when Hubert and I found each other. She liked him so much."

"Had you known each other long?" Minnie Briggs managed to ask.

The girl almost giggled.

"It was romantic," she said. "You know — there's no use putting up a bluff about it — look at me; I'm too fat. I've spent thousands, literally thousands, trying to reduce. I've always been like that. The doctors say it's my glands. Well, there's no good in pretending — it just didn't make me popular with the boys. Oh, I could have got married, plenty of times, but as my sister always said, make sure it's you he wants and not just what you have. Dad was a big brewer; he left sister and me well fixed. I — I wanted a fellow to fall in love with me — you know — not just to think it was a good idea to hitch on to me for my money."

"Of course. And you *are* pretty, you know." She was, except for the fat.

"Oh, do you think so? Thank you. Well, I guess sister was plenty worried about me — and so was I. I was getting so I didn't want to go to parties or anything — and you know, I'm a good dancer; I'm light on my feet. And then one day I was waiting at the dentist's and I picked up this highbrow magazine. It had personals in it, and I started to read them, just for fun. And one was from this engineer, down in South America. He wanted a girl to write to him.

"It had a lot of stuff in it about music and poetry and so on that didn't mean a thing in my young life, but just for fun I cut it out and wrote him a letter. He answered right away, and one thing just led to another. I told him honestly I wasn't much on poetry and all that, and he said neither was he, really — he just put that in because he thought girls liked it, and

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the way I was suited him all right. And I told him about — about my weight — and he said the more of me there was the better he liked it. His mother had been plump, he said, and he liked girls that way.

"That was after I sent him my photo, and he sent me a snapshot of himself. Here it is — wasn't he grand? His name was Hubert Lowrie."

It was Keith Hathaway, of course.

"Then he got leave, and came up here, and we went everywhere together. He found all sorts of quaint out-of-the-way places he used to drive me to. It was just like heaven — I fell for him hard the minute I laid eyes on him, and he told me afterwards he'd fallen for me the same way. I took him home — I live with my sister — and she and my brother-in-law both thought he was swell. We got engaged, and he gave me a cameo ring that used to be his mother's. I've got it on now. I'll always wear it. Then he had to go back to South America — Bolivia, it was — but he was going to send for me just as soon as he could. And then —"

Her eyes filled with tears again, but she swallowed hard and wiped them dry.

"It doesn't matter now," she said determinedly. "I know Hubert's soul is alive somewhere and he's waiting for me, just like you and your husband. Why, do you know, that the advertisement he put in the paper used the very words from some poem Hubert quoted in one of his letters to me! If that doesn't show he really *knows*, what could?" She glanced at her wrist-watch, set with diamonds, and started.

"Oh, I've got to fly. I'm due at the dressmaker's — the Swami says Hubert wouldn't like me to keep on wearing black like this when he really isn't dead except in the body. Excuse me for chattering away like this — you know, it helps, but I'm afraid I've bored you to death — I haven't given you a chance to say a word on your own."

"You haven't bored me a bit," said Minnie Briggs, in a triumph of understatement.

She watched the girl teeter down the street on her high heels, searching for a taxi. The whole clever, complicated plot unfolded to her appalled mind.

The "personal" — the man in Bolivia to receive and forward the letters — the "leave," timed to give each victim her need of companionship — the hideaways chosen to minimize the possibility of crossed paths — the engagement — the "death" — and then, shortly after, the arrival of the Swami. Keith — Hubert — whatever his real name was — must be a sort of advance agent. He lined up the prospects, weeding out the less desirable, selecting, from those who wrote, wealthy young widows or divorcees or single girls who for some reason were lonely and had no suitors. Then he "died," and after the proper interval the Swami came. Of course he knew all their secrets — he got them from his agent himself. Perhaps he himself

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wrote the letters. The quotation in the advertisement was the "come-on" to the right prospects, and if they missed it doubtless there were ways to call it to their attention. And each victim, doubtless — how many would there be in each city? three or four, perhaps — would in the end be permitted to "dedicate" herself to the "work" by sizable contribution, besides what it had already cost her. Probably few were as rich gold-mines as Sophie had proved to be. The extra victims from the lecture audience were just so much velvet.

Minnie Briggs knew well that her duty was to go to the police at once with her story. With her testimony, together with Sophie's — and the police would be able very soon to ferret out the brewer's daughter and in all probability others as well — the Swami Avranyakananda and his associate could soon be put behind bars.

But then what? What did she really care, so long as Sophie was saved? Suppose she was compounding a felony by concealing a conspiracy? But was she, really? All she was doing was to postpone the revelation. She simply could not let this fall on Sophie without preparation — to have her learn it from some callous police detective.

She must, she thought in her own unimpressionable, unexcitable mind, break the news, gently and diplomatically, to Sophie first. Then they could go to the police together. It would be a shock, a bad one. But Sophie, she was certain, would recover from it; she was inherently her father's daughter, despite all the shyness and sensitiveness she took from her mother, and "Bull" Renford had never been broken by disaster — he had always reacted with stubborn anger. Anger was the best tonic for Sophie. She must help Minnie Briggs and the police hunt this man — these men — down, and avenge herself upon them. Then, after it was all over, she would face life with more common sense, shed her romantic notions, and perhaps in the end find someone with whom she could build a solid marriage based on something more than adolescent moonshine. Minnie Briggs had never been in love or needed to be, and she could judge Sophie only from her own logical self.

It was a bad mistake. It made a murderess of Sophie Renford.

Minnie Briggs poured the whole tale out that very evening. She went into detail, from the moment when she had stationed herself in the little park to the moment when the plump young woman had ended her story. She told Sophie about the snapshot, about the ring. She described the inevitable conclusion to which she had come, the damning certainty that not the Swami only, but the man who had called himself Keith Hathaway as well, were merely clever and daring thieves, preying on defenseless, lonely women of wealth.

After her first protests Sophie listened very quietly, her face utterly colorless. When at last Minnie Briggs had finished, she still sat motionless, her hands gripping her chair. The

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companion finally broke the deathly silence.

"I know how terrible this must be for you, dear. But there is only one way to get over it — you and I must punish these wicked men. We must go to the police with what we know."

"Wait —" Sophie's voice was a thread of sound. "Let me think."

"Tomorrow?" asked Minnie Briggs "Will you come with me tomorrow?"

"Yes, tomorrow," Sophie whispered. She rose stiffly and stumbled out of the room. Minnie Briggs heard her climbing the stairs. The companion did not follow her; what the child needed now was to be alone. After a while she too dragged her own weary body to bed.

Sophie had had the little revolver well hidden. It was that night, after every one in the house was asleep, when no one could hear a door opening and closing behind her, that she committed her murder.

She gave herself up without trying to run or hide. She would have pleaded guilty if her lawyers had not insisted on her standing trial. She was too drained of every feeling; she did not care.

As I said, I covered the case from the start, and I first met Sophie Renford when she was in jail awaiting trial. All I have written here I got from her, either then or later, in the institution. It was my paper — as you have doubtless forgotten: I haven't, for it won me the Pulitzer Prize — which finally broke what became known as the "Rich Young Widow Conspiracy Ring," and succeeded — though unfortunately we couldn't recover much of the money already extorted from gullible, unhappy women all over the country — in putting behind the bars, for good long terms, the self-styled "engineer" (his right name, it turned out, was Joseph Gotsch, and the "Swami Avranyakananda" was really his uncle, William Gotsch), his "friend," Tomas Gonsalvez, who was a constituent part of the ring (the Bolivian police took care of him), and the "Swami" himself.

What? You thought it was the Swami whom Sophie Renford killed?

Then you have not understood her nature very well.

She was angered, yes, with a deep, deadly, murderous anger. She would never forgive, and like "Bull" Renford when he met opposition, she could not rest until she had taken her revenge.

The one thing she could not endure was the bursting of the iridescent bubble of her dreams — to be forced to face a cruel reality in which the ardent love she had so longed for and so rejoiced in had never existed at all. There was no man, there never had been any man, alive or dead, whose being was centered on Sophie Renford; and she was compelled to acknowledge that unbearable truth.

It was not the Swami who had dealt her that unforgivable blow. It was not Keith Hathaway.

She shot Minnie Briggs through the heart while her old companion slept.

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Remember Pierre Boileau's ironic little tale, "Triangle," in our December 1948 issue? Readers have asked for more, so here is Monsieur Boileau in a Lupinesquepade which . . . but we have already said too much.

Pierre Boileau is the author of LE REPOS DE BACCHUS, *which won the Adventure Novel Prize in 1938, and* SIX CRIMES SANS ASSASSIN, *in which the classic problem of the "locked room" is solved in five different ways. (Yes, we have requested the author to send us a copy of this book — on the chance that somehow it can be printed in EQMM.)*

Monsieur Boileau's best known character in France is private detective André Brunel, who appears in most of Pierre Boileau's novels and short stories. Detective Brunel is no superman. He epitomizes the absolutely logical mind. His detectival method, which he calls "the method of the 'therefores'," may be summed up thus: to discern the appearance of reality, to discard the impossible, and then to conclude. It is a method in the great tradition — indeed, in the greatest tradition.

MONSIEUR LUCIEN, BURGLAR

by PIERRE BOILEAU

(translated by Anthony Boucher)

GUGUENHEIM was just starting dinner in his back room when the bell rang. He got up grumbling, brushing bits of noodles from his mustache as he climbed the three steps that separated the dirty airless room from what he pompously called "the shop."

His visitor looked about thirty-five or forty; his brick-red face testified to a life spent in the open air under tropical suns. (On his last visit he had confided that he had spent seven years in Cayenne before he escaped from the prison colony.) He carried a large valise which seemed to weigh him down.

Guguenheim's sour expression gave way to a smile which disclosed black and improbably located teeth. This was the fourth time that the convict had visited the shop, and Guguenheim was more than satisfied with their relationship. Not that their dealings had been on a large scale; so far Monsieur Lucien, as he called himself, had turned in only trifling jewels, not worth more than ten or twelve thousand francs all told. But these contacts, Guguenheim felt sure, were mere preliminaries to a more serious operation. The man had already made vague allusions to something of the sort. And he seemed a plausible, reliable character — altogether different from the riffraff of

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burglary which the fence was accustomed to dealing with.

While he was greeting the convict, Guguenheim's eyes lit on the valise. "Come to say goodbye?" he asked.

"I'm going away, all right, but this isn't part of my baggage." Monsieur Lucien peered uneasily toward the street. You could barely see it behind the old clothes hanging in the window. "I have to talk to you — seriously."

"Be with you as soon as I close up. I hadn't planned to close the shop until after supper, but it's just as easy . . ." Guguenheim turned the crank, and the iron curtain came down with a terrible crash. Meanwhile, the visitor had established himself in a dusty and faded Empire armchair.

The fence sat on a piano stool opposite him. "I'm listening."

"Look. The climate in Paris — well, in all France — is getting a little hot for me. I've decided to travel in foreign parts. I don't know yet just where I'll settle down; it isn't entirely a matter of my choice anyway. The one thing I know for sure is that by dawn tomorrow I'll have the border between me and my good friends at Headquarters."

"The devil you say! It's as urgent as all that?"

"Well, let's not exaggerate. All those gentlemen know is that I'm in the city; but since I haven't any desire to return . . . overseas . . ."

"You have a passport?"

Monsieur Lucien smiled as he drew it from his pocket. "All in order. I defy even you to spot anything wrong with it. I've got my ticket for Switzerland and I'm leaving on the Berne express at 22:37, as the railways put it — 10:37 tonight, to you."

Guguenheim was sincerely desolated. "Just my luck! For once I find somebody worth working with . . . And you did lead me to hope —"

Monsieur Lucien looked at his watch. "Well? I've just told you I'm not leaving until 10:37. I've got my reservation, I've checked my suitcase. Say I get to the station a half-hour before train time; that still leaves me two hours now. Have you ever considered how much a determined man can accomplish in two hours?"

The fence gave a whistle of admiration. "Ah! I wish some of your colleagues could hear you — the milksops! So you're planning to leave in a blaze of glory. Could you tell me just how . . . ?"

Monsieur Lucien shifted his chair almost imperceptibly away from his companion and answered carelessly, "You've heard of the Countess de Felbach's brooch?"

Guguenheim's start all but upset the piano stool. "The Countess de . . . ! You're joking!"

"I see you're familiar with it. Photographs have appeared in various magazines. Do you think that the thirteen diamonds, taken out of the setting, could be disposed of without too much risk?"

"Good Lord, you're talking as if the brooch was already in your hands!"

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"Oh, in two hours . . ."

Guguenheim laughed heartily. "I've known some characters who were pretty sure of themselves; but compared with you . . . So you're expecting to break in, just like that, into the vaults of the Lyonnais?"

"Excuse me. The brooch is at this moment in the Count's own safe, in his private home in the Rue Barbet de Jouy."

"He told you, I suppose?"

"Not quite; but I was at the Crédit Lyonnais yesterday afternoon when Felbach took his precious deposit out of the bank. I followed him home."

Guguenheim had stopped laughing.

"Why didn't he leave it in the bank? I don't imagine it was so his wife could wear it. Those two aren't courting the public gaze. On the contrary."

"I see you know the situation. What you don't know is that the Count has decided to sell the brooch."

"So he's at the end of his rope?"

"Precisely. Starting tomorrow the greatest jewelers of Paris will begin their pilgrimages to the Rue Barbet de Jouy — or to be more exact, they will stay quietly in their shops. By that time the pilgrimages will be pointless."

Guguenheim nodded. "Does it look dangerous?"

"Not at all. The Felbachs are spending the evening with the d'Ouvres, the only friends who have not deserted them. The house will be empty."

"The servants?"

"They parted company with the last one a week ago."

"It's not possible! They're down to that?"

"When they've reached the point of having to sell the brooch, the symbol of their glory . . . Three-fourths of their furniture is already sold. And that's why Felbach sees nothing wrong with leaving the brooch in his home; it's the last place a burglar would be interested in."

Again Monsieur Lucien took out his watch. "But I'm talking too much and time is slipping away. To sum it up: It is now five after nine. We'll be in the Rue Barby by nine thirty. I figure it will take me a good twenty minutes to get into the safe. That takes us to —"

"We? Us? What do you mean?"

"I mean that we will take on this job as a team. Naturally, I'd prefer to work alone; that's what I'm used to. But the most elementary caution demands a lookout."

"So you thought of me," the other observed ironically.

"Yes. You know my theories — I've expounded them to you and you've approved fully. I distrust chance companions; with you I'll feel safe."

"But look. The only trouble is: *I don't pull jobs.* I buy the stuff — and that's all."

"Very well. Tonight you'll pull your first job."

"No."

"Yes." Monsieur Lucien rose and thumped his fist on a gaming table.

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"Enough of this childishness, Guguenheim. I'm making you a unique proposition. You won't have another offer like this in your lifetime, and you know that perfectly well. You can't have the stupidity to turn it down."

"But the risks . . ."

"There are no risks with two of us. You know my position; if I'm caught, with my record, I'm done for. Do you think I'd be betting my life on anything less than a sure thing?"

"But . . . well . . . what would I be supposed to do?"

"Ah, you're getting reasonable. Now here's the only complication in this job — the one factor that forces me reluctantly to take on an assistant." He pointed to the valise. "In there I have an acetylene torch which will pierce the thickest metal. My only fear is that somebody will hear the noise or see the light from outside. If I'm alone I'll have to keep scurrying between the safe and the window to see that the street's clear — imagine the waste of time; there goes my two hours, without even mentioning the danger I'd be in. If you're on the lookout, I can go about my work in peace."

"But the neighbors across the street . . ."

"The house faces on a high-walled garden." Monsieur Lucien sat on the arm of a chair. His voice turned suddenly calm, almost sweet. "Listen to me, Guguenheim. If you won't budge, I'll work alone. But I'm warning you; don't count on getting the brooch in that case. If I have to, I'll take all the risks . . . and I'll pry the diamonds out and peddle them myself."

Guguenheim twisted his mustache with a shaky hand. "And if I go along?"

"I'll let you have the article in question for five hundred thousand francs."

The fence caught his breath; the brooch was worth at least two million.

For the third time Monsieur Lucien consulted his watch. He made an impatient gesture. "Come on! Or I'll never catch my train."

After one last, brief hesitation Guguenheim took his bowler hat from its hook. "Of course we're coming back here?"

"Will there be time? Better bring the money with you; then I can head straight for the station."

The old fence made no objection. Who could tell, if they came back to the shop, whether the convict might change his mind and try to force up the price? "Go on," he said. "I'll be with you in a minute."

Monsieur Lucien opened the door, shoved his valise out on the sidewalk, and crouched down to get under the iron curtain. Guguenheim's first thought was to take a revolver from the drawer of the gaming table. Then he slipped into the dark room where an army of flies was besieging the bowl of noodles. A moment later he rejoined his companion, his pockets bulging with banknotes.

They took a taxi as far as the

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Boulevard des Invalides, in front of the Musée Rodin. The street was deserted. Monsieur Lucien strode along, valise in hand, seeming perfectly at ease; but the same could hardly be said of Guguenheim. A dozen times during their walk he turned to his accomplice and opened his mouth to say, "I've thought it over; I'm not going." But cupidity finally won out over fear.

In the Rue Barbet de Jouy, Monsieur Lucien took two shiny new keys out of an inner pocket.

"You've taken every precaution, I see." Guguenheim observed in a pallid voice.

"Of course. But stop moping like a whipped cur; I promise you everything will go off all right."

They reached the house without meeting a soul. Monsieur Lucien looked about cautiously, then resolutely marched up to the door. The lock turned without a sound. Monsieur Lucien drew back to let his companion pass, but Guguenheim recoiled.

"No, no . . . You first, I'll follow you."

The convict shrugged his shoulders and went in. Guguenheim waited a moment, drew a deep breath, and crossed the threshold as if he were plunging into a bottomless pool.

Monsieur Lucien closed and bolted the door and lit his flashlight. A short flight of marble stairs rose in front of them. They went up, Guguenheim trembling so badly that he had to pull himself up by the rail.

"You're absolutely sure that . . ." he started to whisper.

To reassure him, the convict cried out with all his might, "Anybody home?" His voice seemed to fill the house, but there was no answer. Guguenheim was satisfied; this was conclusive.

"There's only one danger, as I told you," Monsieur Lucien repeated as he opened a glass-paneled door. "That's somebody noticing something from outside. Aside from that, I guarantee everything."

They crossed three pitiful rooms, almost completely emptied of furnishings, their carpets rolled up in the corners. Everywhere the chandeliers had been dismantled and the bulbs hung dismally at the ends of naked wires.

The safe was in the study, a room obviously designed for luxury but now displaying little save empty bookshelves. Guguenheim, his spirits much brighter now, slipped behind the curtains and pressed against the window, from which he could watch the street for about fifty meters.

Monsieur Lucien opened his valise and took out two steel cylinders shaped like large bottles. He set them on the floor and attached two rubber tubes which met in a nozzle. He turned off his flash, struck a flame with his lighter, and turned a valve. A blue flame shot out, and a prolonged hiss arose.

The operation ran off smoothly. Once in a great while a passerby would come along, and Guguenheim

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would whisper, "Look out!" Monsieur Lucien would break off until the intruder had gone his way, with no notion of the strange scene being enacted so near him.

"Go ahead," Guguenheim would say then, and Monsieur Lucien would resume work, while the old fence turned frequently to cast an eye on how things were going.

When finally Monsieur Lucien turned off the torch, relit his flashlight, and took a crowbar from the valise, Guguenheim could stand it no longer. There was no one in the street. He left his lookout with a cry of, "You made it?"

"I think so."

A hole indicated where the lock had been. The door was still smoking. A slight pressure with the crowbar was enough to open it wide. The safe compartments were all empty but one. In this there was a red-leather jewel case.

"May I . . . ?" The fence greedily thrust out his hand.

"Please do . . . though I'm afraid it may still be a trifle hot."

Guguenheim was beyond caring. He snatched up the case as swiftly as a cat filching from a plate of food. The sharp pang of his burned skin was not enough to make him drop it. He trembled as he opened it. The diamond brooch glittered in the light of the flash.

"A beautiful piece!" Monsieur Lucien murmured. "I never realized . . ."

A sudden fear seized Guguenheim. Supposing the convict should revise his price! "You told me you wanted to do business on the spot," he said hastily.

"Yes. I can't have much time left."

The fence closed the case and slipped it inside his coat, then emptied his pockets of the bundles they contained.

The convict did not even bother to count the notes.

As their steps echoed in the empty salon, Guguenheim looked at the piled-up carpets and sighed.

"If you want my false keys," his companion observed with scornful irony, "you could come back with a truck."

On the Esplanade des Invalides, Monsieur Lucien hailed a taxi and offered the fence a lift home.

Guguenheim shook his head. "Too risky. The driver might talk."

Monsieur Lucien understood perfectly well the old man's desire to get quickly away from his criminal companion. They shook hands.

"Well, goodbye, then. Good luck."

"Good luck to you, too."

The taxi drew up. "East Station," said Monsieur Lucien.

For several minutes Monsieur Lucien lolled back motionless on the seat. But as the cab reached the Boulevards, he suddenly sat up and rapped on the glass.

"I just noticed I forgot something. Take me back to the Invalides."

He got out, as before, in front of the Musée Rodin and retraced his

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steps to the house in the Rue Barbet de Jouy. Once more he opened the door and called out, "Anybody home?"

And this time a voice answered, "At last! Darling . . . I thought I'd go mad."

He turned on the light switch and the blonde Countess de Felbach appeared at the head of the marble stairs; the brooch of thirteen diamonds glittered on her bosom. She ran to her husband's arms. "Quick! Tell me everything! Did it go off all right?"

He displayed the bundles of banknotes. "What do you think?"

"Wonderful! He didn't make any fuss about coming with you?"

"I wouldn't quite say that, but he came. Though God knows my excuses were thin enough."

"And he agreed to bring the money with him?"

"Yes, and there my excuse really made sense. It wasn't for the pure pleasure of acting that I played the escaped convict." And with the back of his hand he began to wipe the brick-red color from his face.

"Wonderful!" the Countess repeated. "And that horrid little man didn't have the slightest suspicion of the brooch? After all, that's his profession."

"Remember it was an admirably successful imitation; you could have been fooled yourself. And then he saw it only by the light of the flash . . . which I was careful not to hold too close."

Still talking, they wandered into the salon. "Monsieur Lucien" contemplated the brooch tenderly.

"Didn't I promise you I'd save our symbol from disaster?" His gaze wandered over the bare walls with the unfaded oblongs which betokened a vanished collection.

"Five hundred thousand francs! And now you've seen what I can do when I put my mind to it. Trust me, darling. Give me just a year."

And he broke off with a wild laugh. "But to start with, I'd give ten per cent of my winnings to see Guguenheim's face when he screws his glass in his eye and examines his purchase."

Guguenheim grinned a black toothed grin as he screwed the glass in his eye. His other hand still caressed the red-leather case, postponing the delicious moment of opening it again.

"The idiot!" he muttered to himself. "I'd give a pretty penny to see his face tomorrow — when he tries to buy Swiss francs with five hundred thousand francs of counterfeit French banknotes!"

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Jo Gar, on the trail of the Rainbow Diamonds in the labyrinth of the East, had come to a blind Chinese and a Chinese chauffeur. The blind Chinese knew where the Rainbow Diamonds were — Jo Gar was quite certain of that; and the Chinese chauffeur had known something too. But before Jo Gar could make either speak, a bullet and a knife confirmed that ancient truth — "Dead men do not talk."

Where next? Follow the scarlet thread of murder and manhunting, of death and diamonds. The diminutive Island detective, Jo Gar, his gray-blue eyes always alert, a brown-paper cigarette always hanging from his lips, will lead the way . . .

"The Rainbow Murders" is not a serial. All you need to know of past events is that Jo Gar is seeking ten diamonds, worth $200,000, stolen from a jewelry store in Manila — seeking both the loot and the looters. Each questing is a complete short story by itself — tough and terse, and in the hardboiled school that took its violence and villainy with almost casual nonchalance.

RED DAWN

by RAOUL WHITFIELD

BARRINGTON regarded Jo Gar with frowning, dark eyes. He was tall, immaculately dressed, fresh looking. He was the power and brains back of the native Hawaiian police force, and it was very evident that the Philippine Island detective's calm annoyed him.

"I strongly advise you to return to your ship, Señor Gar," he said slowly.

Jo Gar smiled with his thin, colorless lips. His almond shaped eyes seemed sleepy, but were not sleepy. And Barrington sensed that. He stretched his long legs, rose from the wicker chair of his office. But he did not move about. He stared down at Jo.

"Ten extremely valuable diamonds — the famous Rainbow diamonds — were stolen in Manila," he said quietly. "You have got one back — but nine are missing. You were forced to kill the man from whom you recovered the one, on the *Cheyo Maru*. That was unfortunate."

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Jo Gar nodded his head just a little. "Very unfortunate," he agreed. "But also — very necessary."

Barrington shrugged. "Perhaps you were too aggressive, Señor Gar," he suggested.

Jo Gar smiled a little more broadly. "I am never aggressive, Señor Barrington," he returned very quietly. "Manila is a city of heat — heat breeds laziness."

The American made a peculiar, snorting sound. He turned towards his desk and glanced at the report of the Hawaiian police, made less than a half hour ago, at midnight.

"Benfeld, Tan Ying and Dave Chang — all dead. And you are not aggressive?"

Jo Gar shrugged almost casually. "Benfeld was the representative of the Dutch company that had insured the diamonds. For some reason he wished me to stop my search for them, and for the thieves who murdered to get them. He attempted to trap me. He used Chang for that purpose and Chang suffered. The blind Chinese, Tan Ying — I am not sure how he was involved. I think there was to have been a meeting at his place. More than one person was concerned in the Manila robbery and murders. Perhaps there was to be a meeting at Ying's place. But Benfeld thought I had been shot to death, on the road beyond the city. I upset his plans — and there was sudden death."

"Triple death," Barrington said steadily. "You are sure you learned nothing?"

Jo Gar rose from his straight-backed chair. He lied impassively.

"Nothing — that seems to lead me anywhere," he said. "It is like that Street of the Lanterns where Ying lived — much color and sound, and so difficult to see or hear beyond either color or sound."

Barrington half closed his dark eyes. He said very grimly:

"You are known to be in Honolulu, Señor Gar. It is known that you are after the Von Loffler diamonds, and that you seek the murderers of your friend, Juan Arragon — and of that jeweler's son, Delgado. Already there has been death. And dawn is hours away. I should strongly advise —"

Jo Gar's lips made a clicking sound. "You have already suggested that I return to the *Cheyo Maru*," he said calmly. "It is kind of you to think of my protection. Perhaps I shall accept your advice."

Barrington continued to frown. "I hope so," he said. "We will do everything possible, here. You will be in San Francisco in six days — and I wish you luck."

Jo Gar smiled and bowed. They did not shake hands. The Philippine Island detective reached the street and kept his brown right-hand fingers in the right pocket of his light coat. A cool breeze swept from the direction of Pearl Harbor. The streets were almost deserted.

The Island detective smiled with his almond-shaped eyes almost closed, moved slowly in the direction of the docks. They were not far from the

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building in which Barrington had his office. And as he walked, with his eyes glancing sharply from the corners, Jo Gar sighed. His stubby fingers tightened on the grip of the automatic in his right coat pocket.

"Señor Barrington does not wish *more* death — in Honolulu," he murmured very softly. "He is anxious for my departure — he thinks of my health."

Jo's white teeth showed in a swift grin. It faded, and he reached with his left-hand fingers for one of his brown paper cigarettes. The street became suddenly an alley; his eyes caught the slanting masts of ships, their rigging beside the docks. He was ten feet along the alley when he halted, struck the match. But even as the flare dulled his vision, he saw the shape that slid from the doorway less than twenty yards distant. He heard the swift intake of the short man's breath, saw the right arm go upward and back!

The Island detective moved his left hand away from his face, let his short body fall forward. As he went down his right hand shoved the material of his coat pocket ahead of him — started to squeeze the trigger.

But there was no hiss of a knife hurled through the air, and no crack sound from his automatic. He relaxed his grip, rocking on his knees, as he watched the figure of the man who had slid from the doorway bend forward. The man's head was held low — his body was almost doubled as he pitched downward. He choked terribly but weakly — there was a sharp crack as his head battered against the broken pavement of the alley.

Jo Gar swayed to his feet. He moved back into the darkness of a narrow doorway on the opposite side of the alley from that where the short one had fallen. He waited, his back flattened against a wooden door that did not give, holding his breath.

The man who had collapsed made no movement. His head had struck heavily, but Jo knew that he had been unconscious before he had fallen. And yet, when he had slid from the doorway across the alley, his movements had been swift and sure. He had sucked in his breath, drawn back an arm. And Jo was sure there had been a knife in his hand.

Minutes passed. There was the faint sounds of machines, in the direction towards the city center, away from the docks. A cool wind rustled some paper down the alley. It was quite dark, and Jo could not see beyond the body of the man. Once he had heard footfalls in the distance, and the sound of high pitched voices. The alley was on the edge of the Chinese quarter, perhaps in it.

His right forefinger pressed the steel of the automatic trigger — the material of his right pocket was held clear of his side. But he made no movement. Five minutes passed. Jo Gar shivered a little. He was sure that death had come to the one across the alley from some spot directly behind him — and that the person who had caused the death was waiting silently, for some other movement in the narrow alley.

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He breathed slowly, carefully. His right wrist was aching from the tensity of his grip on the automatic, and his eyes moved only from the motionless figure on the pavement to the blackness of the low doorway behind the figure. The shacks along the alley appeared to be closed, deserted. But the entrances existed — and in the one almost opposite him was the human cause of another person's death. Unless — and there did not seem much chance of that — there had been an escape through the shack beyond the motionless, sprawled figure.

The Island detective listened to the shrill whistle of a small boat, beyond the docks. He relaxed his body a little, but suddenly it was tense again. He had heard, very distinctly, a faint chuckle. It had not come from the doorway in darkness, beyond the collapsed figure, but from some spot above him.

He raised his head slightly. The shacks were low — less than fifteen feet high. Clouds were over a crescent moon; the night had become dark. But he could see nothing on the roof of the shack opposite.

And then, very softly and quietly, the voice sounded. It was low and throaty — and very calm.

"Señor Gar — you are comfortable?"

Jo Gar did not move his body. There was a quality to the voice, an accent of grim amusement. He had a definite feeling that he was trapped — that the death of the man across the alley had been a part of the trap. He did not speak. The voice sounded again — from above, and to the left. The roof of a shack on his left and on his side of the alley held the speaker, he guessed.

"You will kindly disarm yourself — step into the alley, Señor Gar."

The Island detective raised his automatic higher, withdrew it from the right pocket. He moved only his right arm. The voice said, after a short pause:

"Do not be a fool, Señor Gar!"

The accent was clear. He had heard the same accent of precise English in Manila. It was Spanish — this man's native language. And the speaker was calm — very calm. He was sure of himself.

Seconds passed. Then the voice said, a little more loudly:

"*Si*, but very low, and — now!"

Jo Gar heard the steely hiss of the knife. He drew his legs together. The left trouser material, just above his ankle, was jerked sharply. Wood made dull sound as the knife blade cut into the door at his left side. His body was rigid.

The voice somewhere above said with sharp amusement:

"Señor Gar — you are comfortable?"

The Island detective sighed. The cat played with the mouse, but more wisely than most cats. Jo Gar reached down, jerked the knife loose from wood and cloth. He tossed it into the alley. Straightening, he said as steadily as he could: "What is it you wish, Señor Mendez?"

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Again there was the chuckle. And then a short silence. Jo Gar was thinking: It is Mendez. Chang said, before dying in the shop: "It was Mendez. We met in the Street of the Lanterns. He was coming —" That was what Chang had said. Mendez coming to meet someone, in Honolulu. Perhaps the one in white. The one Jo had been forced to shoot to death, on the *Cheyo Maru*, and from whom he had got the one Von Loffler diamond. But Mendez knew that Jo had killed, and he had trapped him now, and was toying with him, grimly amused.

The Island detective stood motionless, looking at the body across the alley.

"Kindly disarm yourself — step into the alley, Señor Gar."

Jo sighed again. He bent forward and tossed the automatic into the alley. There was a flashlight beam that picked it up, then faded. Jo stepped from the doorway, moved out a few feet. The voice said:

"Face towards the docks."

The tone was hard now, sharp. Jo did as directed. He stood for seconds, his eyes slitted, his body slightly relaxed. He expected death at any moment, from behind. But it did not come. There were sounds on the roofs of the shacks, sounds behind him. But he did not turn. And then the same, hard voice sounded, directly behind him.

"Go to the alley end, walk slowly. There will be a closed car. Enter it. I shall be near you, and I advise you to be wise."

The Island detective moved slowly forward. The alley narrowed, then widened. At the dock end there was a small, dirty machine. It was closed, and there was the fat, brown-yellow face of a Chinese faintly lighted by the instrument board light. The man did not turn his head, but a rear door of the machine opened as Jo neared it. The voice, now close behind, said:

"Step inside."

Jo got into the car. A figure made room for him. The seat had space for three, back of the driver. Jo dropped heavily beside the one already seated. The one who had spoken got in and sat on his right. The interior of the car was very dark, but Jo saw that the man's features were sharp, his face long.

He said to the driver, in any easy tone:

"Yes — and do not go too fast."

It was as though everything had been carefully planned. Jo tightened his lips. He was sure that the one on his right was the man known as Mendez, and he was sure that Mendez was hard and extremely clever. He had been followed from the police station to the building in which Barrington had an office, and Mendez had waited. Perhaps something had gone wrong, and there had been a death in the alley, or perhaps nothing had gone wrong, and it had been part of the scheme of things.

The man on Jo's right said softly: "It will not take very long, I hope, Señor Gar."

Jo smiled a little. He nodded his

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head. "You are Señor Mendez?" he asked.

The man was tall and thin. He had long, slender shaped hands and wore a dark coat. That much Jo could see as the car moved slowly along the street by the docks.

He said: "*Si* — Señor Mendez. There have been words about me?"

The Island detective turned his head towards Mendez. He spoke very steadily.

"Chang spoke of you — and Tan Ying."

The grim quality returned to Mendez' voice again. He spoke very slowly.

"And both Ying and Chang are dead. That is too bad."

Jo Gar smiled, showing his white, even teeth. Then his lips pressed together.

"So many people die — for diamonds," he observed.

Mendez nodded. His face was turned towards the driver's back. The machine was running slowly out of town; it was not going towards the beach, but through the poorer section of Honolulu.

"It is so," Mendez agreed. "But you are a curious one, Señor Gar. Even so — why should *you* die — for diamonds?"

The Island detective said nothing. He tried to keep his body relaxed, but there was a threat in Mendez' words. It was a question that Mendez asked, and yet only half a question.

The machine was out of the town now; it was running through the tropical growth, and there was suddenly a moon showing through the clouds.

Mendez made a gesture with his long right hand. He said almost cheerfully:

"It is pretty, Señor — these warm countries. They make one want to live."

The Island detective kept his eyes to the front. For almost five minutes the car moved at good speed over a road that was fairly smooth. Then it slowed, turned abruptly to the left. The road became narrower. It was of dirt now, and the country was rolling. The moon seemed strangely bright for its size — and the car passed through what appeared to be a pineapple plantation. The one on Jo's left let his body rock with the car motion, but he did not look at the Island detective.

Mendez made another gesture with his right hand.

"It is not unlike the Philippines," he said slowly. "You would like to return some day, Señor Gar?"

Again there was the mocking quality in his voice. Jo turned his head, and the two regarded one another. Mendez' skin was a light brown color; his eyes were dark. They were cruel eyes, and intelligent. The man's features were good, but his lips were very thin and the curve of his mouth was barely perceptible.

Jo Gar said steadily: "Yes — I should like to return — some day."

Mendez nodded. "It will not be difficult for you," he returned. "You are not — a fool."

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The car jerked suddenly off the road. It ran a short distance, scraping foliage, so narrow was the path it traveled. It stopped. The one on Jo's left leaned forward and looked at Mendez, but he did not speak. Mendez said:

"That is all — but stay."

The door on the left was opened. Mendez said pleasantly, as the one to whom he had spoken descended:

"We will leave the machine, Señor. I have a gun in my right hand. There is a small plantation house just beyond the car. Will you walk towards it?"

Jo Gar let his eyes widen a little on the dark eyes of the Spaniard. He said quietly:

"You can murder me here — just as well, Señor Mendez."

For a second he saw sardonic amusement creep into the thin-faced one's eyes. And then a puzzled expression showed. But he knew that Mendez was acting now.

"Murder you?" The Spaniard laughed in a chuckling way. "Why do you think of murder, Señor Gar?"

The Island detective smiled. "Does it seem so strange?" he replied. "After all — you are aware of the Von Loffler diamonds. For them there has been much murder."

Mendez nodded, his face suddenly serious. "That is so," he agreed. "But you were not satisfied."

Jo Gar's gray-blue eyes showed no expression. "Not satisfied?" he said very tonelessly.

Mendez frowned. "At the house we can talk more easily," he said.

Jo Gar shrugged. He got from the car, saw the thatch-roofed house through the thinned foliage, up a slope a short distance. There were windows, but no lights. The house was well protected from even the narrow path. The dirt road was a hundred yards or more distant, and the other road perhaps a half mile.

The Island detective moved slowly up a path that wound. He heard Mendez instruct the driver to turn the machine and take it down near the dirt road. As he walked slowly up the slope he heard the engine of the car changing speed. Twice the brakes made squealing sound. There was no sign of the one who had been seated on his left.

He was certain of one thing — Mendez held death for him. Perhaps there was information that the Spaniard wanted first. Perhaps he would make promises. But in the end there would be death. He could read it in the dark eyes, feel it in the cold amusement of Mendez' voice. And it was in the mockery of the Spaniard's words, too.

Behind him he heard the Spaniard's footfalls, very close. He moved slowly, and he was thinking fast. There was a better chance outside, here on the path, than there would be within the thatch-roofed plantation house.

The Spaniard said almost pleasantly: "It is the fine view that Señor Benfeld liked here. The dawn — it is all red. The sun rising from the water —"

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He let his voice die. He was breathing a little heavily now. Jo Gar said, suddenly stopping and breathing as though with difficulty:

"Benfeld tried to kill me, Mendez. He was a representative of the insurance company handling the Von Loffler stones. He thought I would be off my guard, because of that. How much was he offered — for my death?"

Mendez said cheerfully: "Enough, Señor Gar. But he was a fool — and not careful enough. He knew that you were trained in hunting down people, yet he was careless."

Jo Gar moved slowly up the slope again. He was breathing very heavily, though he was not tired. Behind him he could hear Mendez. And he was sure that the Spaniard was not pretending. He slowed his pace just a little, spoke haltingly.

"I will make — a bargain with you — Señor Mendez. If you will let me — have the chance —"

He uttered the last word softly, easily. And then, like a cat, he let his body swing around — he leaped at the figure of the man behind and several feet below him on the path.

But even as his short body shot through the air — he knew that he had lost. He saw Mendez' body stiffen — the features of the long, sharp face were twisted into a mask of hate. The Spaniard's body swung to one side. His right hand went up and then came down. Something gleamed dully in it. The first time it struck Jo a glancing blow on the shoulder. But as his hands and knees hit the earth — it struck him again, in a second chopping motion. Pain streaked across the back of his head — the yellow light of the moon became a curtain of black. He lost consciousness.

The room held little furniture, and what there was of it was bamboo. There was a table and two chairs, and between the windows a small bookcase. Mendez stood near the bookcase, his back to the wall of the house that was little more than a shack. The lamp on the table had a faulty wick, or the oil was bad. The light was faint and uneven. Shadows were on the walls. Mendez said in a conversational tone:

"You are lying, Gar. You have been lying for an hour. And there are few hours left to you. You were successful, in the Islands — but the Philippines are not like these islands. They are hotter — and the brain of that breed is stupid. You killed a man, on the *Cheyo Maru*. And that man had with him ten diamonds. They were worth more than two hundred thousand dollars. You tell me you found only one of them. You are lying."

Jo Gar slumped in one of the bamboo chairs. Pains stabbed across his head. The gun that Mendez used was a heavy one, and the Spaniard had struck him with a savage motion. There was blood on the Island detective's face, and on the fingers of his right hand. He was tired. Three times in the last hour Mendez had struck him. Once the one who had sat on his left in the car had struck him — he

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was a Chinese with a stupid, sullen face. He sat in a chair and watched the Island detective now, his eyes expressionless. The driver of the car was not in the plantation shack.

Jo said thickly: "I have told you the truth, Mendez. From the one in white — the one the Malay spoke of before he died, in Manila — I got only one diamond. It was he who told me of the blind Chinese. That was why I went there."

Mendez' sharp face held a dull hatred now. It was clear that he did not believe the man who had tried to trick him on the sloping path that led to the plantation shack. Jo Gar knew that he had lost much, in that attempt. But he also knew that from the beginning Mendez had determined to kill.

The Spaniard said in a toneless voice: "You are a fool, Gar. For years you have been lucky. But that was with Chinese and Island half-breeds. I will tell you something — because now it will not matter. Either you are lying — or two others are lying. On the *Cheyo Maru* were three persons who might have had the Von Loffler stones. The man you murdered was one of them. But the diamonds were not separated. One person had the ten of them. That was agreed upon. And you got one from the man you killed. Which means that you are lying. You got them all."

Jo Gar shook his head. "Only one," he said steadily. "How do you know the truth of what you say?"

Mendez smiled. "*I* was one of the three persons — aboard the *Cheyo Maru*," he said steadily. "I did not travel first class. I did not have the diamonds. The man you killed had them — all ten of them. And you have them now. You are a fool — because they will do you no good."

The Island detective pulled his short body up a little. He said very slowly:

"There was — the third man —"

He watched Mendez' eyes narrow. But the Spaniard shook his head.

"I said that either you lie, or two others lie," Mendez said grimly. "I am one of those two others, and I do not lie. And the other one — she is —"

His body stiffened, for a second rage showed in his eyes. And then suddenly, as though he remembered that it would not matter, he relaxed. He smiled grimly. Jo Gar widened his almost colorless eyes.

"A woman —" he said very slowly. "There was a woman who —"

His own voice died away. Mendez smiled coldly. He lighted a cigarette.

"It makes no difference to you," he said. "You have killed one of the three who might have had the diamonds. I tell you that I was one of the three, and I did not have them. A woman was the other. *You* say you have one of the stones. *I* say you have them all."

Jo Gar said thickly: "Then why did I go to the shop of the blind Chinese?"

Mendez continued to smile. "That is simple," he replied. "Benfeld, who

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had told us much about the diamonds because he was in Holland when they were insured, and because he needed money which we gave him, was desperate when told that if he did not help us he would be exposed. He attempted to have you murdered, but he worked crudely, and you were suspicious. You avoided our guns — but you knew that there was a blind Chinese in Honolulu who was important. You were curious. You had the diamonds, but you wanted the thieves, the killers. And you were lucky — until you left Barrington."

The Island detective shook his head. Mendez was about to bargain with him, to make an offer — a final offer. He knew that. But Mendez would not bargain honestly. He could not. There had been three persons on the *Cheyo Maru* — three who were important. And one had been a woman. One was Mendez. The other was dead. Jo Gar had recovered one diamond — nine were missing. Yet he believed Mendez in one thing — the Spaniard was convinced that the man he had killed had possessed all of the diamonds, and that the Island detective had them now.

Jo Gar said slowly: "I tell you the truth, Mendez. Ten diamonds were stolen in Manila. I have recovered only one of them. I do not think the man I killed had more than that one. I believe you — you have none of them. The woman has tricked you into thinking —"

The Spaniard moved across the room and struck him heavily over the face. He stepped back, rage in his eyes. The Island detective pressed his lips tightly together. Mendez backed across the room. He took his gun from a pocket, stared at Jo. His eyes flickered to those of the Chinese, and he suddenly became thoughtful.

Jo Gar's tongue touched his lips and tasted blood. His brain was working clearly, in spite of the blow. He had something to work on now. Benfeld had given information that had led to the thieves tracing the diamonds, learning where they were. Three had got away from Manila aboard the *Cheyo Maru*, and one was a woman. He had not thought about a woman.

He muttered very softly: "It is *she* — who has the other nine stones. In some way — she got them, leaving the man in white only one —"

His muttering stopped as he watched Mendez' eyes slit on his. The Spaniard was smiling with his thin, straight lips — but his eyes held a cold hatred. He looked at Jo Gar, but he spoke to the Chinese.

"You tell driver — no need him. You take rifle and go where I show. Driver go back to Honolulu — keep quiet or it be bad. You stay with rifle ready. You know what I tell — much gold for you. Good?"

The Chinese rose and grinned. He said in the same doggerel manner:

"Good."

He showed red gums as he grinned at Jo Gar. Then he went from the plantation shack, closing the door back of him. Mendez waited several minutes, and then glanced through

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one of the windows that faced the east. The shack was almost atop a rise — the moonlight seemed brighter now.

Mendez said tonelessly: "For you — it will be a — red dawn, Señor Gar. One way or the other. If you tell me the truth — you will watch the sun come up from the path and go back to town. If you refuse to do that — you will go out of this room — and the Chinese with the rifle —"

He broke off, shrugged. Jo Gar said wearily:

"I have told you — the truth."

The Spaniard walked to within a few feet of him, stared down at him.

"One of Tan Ying's men tried to knife you tonight, Gar," he said slowly. "That was hate. He did *not* knife you because he was knifed first. I used him — to help me. Two hundred thousand dollars is more money than I need. Half of that is sufficient — for me. The other half — that is for you."

Jo Gar stared at the Spaniard. "And — the woman?" he said slowly.

He watched Mendez' facial muscles twitch. But the thin-faced one showed his teeth in a smile.

"I will — see to her," he said slowly, softly.

Jo Gar shook his head. "You could not — run the risk of allowing me to go free, Mendez," he said steadily. "If I gave you five diamonds — you would kill me — very swiftly."

Eagerness showed in the Spaniard's dark eyes. He took a step nearer Jo.

"I swear to it — by the name of —"

His words died, rage replaced the eagerness in his eyes. Jo Gar was shaking his head slowly. The Island detective said:

"I have recovered — only one stone."

Mendez reached down and struck him across the left temple with his right fist. Jo pulled himself up from the chair, but was battered down again by a sharp blow. He slumped low, groaning. Mendez moved away from his chair.

There was the sound of a match striking, and a little later Jo smelled the odor of a cigarette. He rocked his head from side to side, but did not look up. Mendez said grimly, harshly:

"You will have — until dawn. And then you will go outside — walking. The Chinese is less than fifty yards distant, with the rifle. I will remain inside until the sound of the shots has died. The Chinese will go away — after he has seen you fall. It is all — very simple."

Jo Gar raised his head slightly. He wiped red from his face with the back of his right hand.

"That will not get you — the Von Loffler — diamonds," he breathed thickly.

Mendez pulled on his cigarette, leaned against a wall of the plantation shack and smiled.

"If you go to your death — that way — I will believe you," he said. "Then I will know where to look. But she has never —"

Jo Gar tried a grim smile. "She has never — lied before?" he muttered.

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"Women are often — like that. There must be — the first time. And white glass — worth thousands — is a reason for — lies."

Mendez pressed his lips tightly together. "You've tricked — too many men, Señor Gar," he breathed. "I hate you for that — and I do not believe you. You have the diamonds — ten of them."

Jo Gar raised his eyes. Suddenly his body stiffened. He said weakly:

"I do not think — they are worth it. But five — that is too many — to give. I will — give you — three —"

Mendez dropped his cigarette and crushed it with his shoe sole. He took rapid steps to Jo's side. His eyes were shining.

"You will give — five!" he snapped.

The Island detective stared at him stupidly. But he shook his head from side to side. Mendez swore and struck at him savagely. The Island detective let his head fall low; he closed his eyes. Mendez struck him again, then moved across the room.

"By dawn," he muttered hoarsely, "you will give me — the five!"

Jo Gar said weakly, his eyes expressionless:

"And what proof have I — that you will let me go away from here — safely?"

Mendez shrugged his shoulders. He was confident of winning. He felt that Jo was breaking down; it had been a long night. Ten diamonds — perfect and of large carat. Two hundred thousand dollars! The Island detective could read his thoughts. He was so sure of winning, so sure the man in the chair before him possessed the diamonds.

And Jo was thinking of a woman — of the third of the three who had held up the Delgado jewelry store in Manila, and one of those responsible for the death of his friend, Juan Arragon. She would be one of many women aboard the *Cheyo Maru*, which would leave Honolulu for San Francisco at noon — but he knew that *he* would not be aboard the boat that had brought him from Manila.

Mendez would see to that. The Mendez who stood before him now, mocking and battering him. The Mendez who was convinced that he had the ten Von Loffler diamonds, and who had already told him too much.

"Red dawn" — the Spaniard had said. There had been a mockery in those words, too. His lips shaped themselves into a bitter smile as he remembered the advice that Barrington had given him — advice to return to the *Cheyo Maru*.

Mendez said very slowly: "Well — there is an end to this, Gar. I will give you five minutes. The sun is getting up. I have much to do. If you swear to me —"

Jo Gar got unsteadily to his feet. Mendez regarded him with a twisted smile. The Island detective was unarmed and very weak.

The Island detective said thickly: "I do not want to die, Mendez. I will tell you the truth. But *you* must swear to *me* — that I will go free."

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Mendez' eyes showed eagerness again. But the next second they had narrowed, and held a hard expression.

"I swear to you — that you will go free — if you tell me where the diamonds are."

Jo Gar nodded his head. He knew that no matter what he said he would not go free. He raised his head and looked Mendez squarely in the eyes with his bloodshot ones.

"*I did* get them — from the one — on the boat," he said steadily, softly. "I have had them — with me — *on* me. But in the car — it seemed very bad. I was — afraid. I had them in one of my Manila cigarette packages, mixed with a few cigarettes —"

He paused, swayed a little. Mendez stepped in very close to him. His voice was shaking.

"In your — cigarette package!" he breathed fiercely. "You had them —"

Jo Gar nodded as Mendez' voice died. He said weakly, brokenly:

"The Chinese — on my left. He had a sack-like coat. I slipped the cigarette package — in a pocket — his right pocket."

Mendez swore sharply. He muttered angrily:

"The Chinese —"

His body swung away from Jo Gar instinctively. His fingers clutched at the knob of the door that opened on the path. And then, suddenly, he remembered. There was the rifle.

His body started to turn, but even as he threw up his arms in protection, Jo Gar swung outward and downward with the chair he had lifted from the floor. All his remaining strength was in the swing.

The Spaniard's arms swung loosely — his head fell sideways under the impact of the blow. He staggered back from the door, his eyes staring. And in a swift movement Jo Gar had the door opened.

Mendez struck at him weakly — the Island detective had little power in the blow that caught the Spaniard on the right shoulder, spinning him around. But it knocked Mendez off balance — he plunged towards the opened door. He was almost to his knees as his body angled beyond the plantation shack.

The first shot crashed. There was a second — and then two more. Jo Gar stood motionless, listened to two more shots from the repeating rifle. Then there was silence, and later a crashing in the foliage below the shack.

After a long minute the Island detective went outside and made certain that Mendez was dead. Then he went back into the room. It was all red with the rising sun. He sat in a chair for a few minutes. He got a package of Manila cigarettes from a pocket and lighted one. He thought of the woman, a man who was now dead had spoken about. Five minutes later when he stepped over the body of Mendez to leave the plantation shack he did not look down. But as he went down the path he muttered:

"He did not lie — about two things. The Chinese was waiting — with his rifle. And the dawn was — very — red."

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"I am in the habit of looking not so much to the nature of a gift as to the spirit in which it is offered."
—NEW ARABIAN NIGHTS, *The Suicide Club*

One of the most popular forms of publishing a century ago was the annual gift book which made its appearance at the end of each year as a Christmas and New Year's bestseller. These volumes were anthologies, containing both prose and poetry, and at the peak of their development were beautiful pieces of bookmaking. They came in almost all sizes, ornately bound in fancy, hand-tooled leather or in highly decorated cloth, with heavy gilt edges, copperplate or color frontispieces, double title pages, one engraved and illustrated, the other typographic, and usually with a profusion of illustrations, some of them protected by tissue-paper inserts. The typography was uniformly dignified and of a superior quality.

Your Editors' collection of detective-crime short stories includes four of these annuals, all dated in the 1840s. The largest and most important one is THE GIFT: A CHRISTMAS, NEW YEAR, AND BIRTHDAY PRESENT, 1845, *published by Carey and Hart of Philadelphia late in 1844. Our copy is bound in red cloth, so elaborately stamped in blind and in gilt that it looks at first glance like leather; it is 8½ inches tall and 5½ inches wide. This volume contains two poems each by Henry W. Longfellow and R. W. Emerson, a variety of tales by such writers as Charles Fenno Hoffman, and the most important detective short story ever to appear in a gift annual of a hundred years ago — "The Purloined Letter" by Edgar A. Poe.*

The next largest is THE GIFT: A CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR'S PRESENT FOR 1842, *published by Carey & Hart of Philadelphia late in 1841, in sumptuous rose-beige-and-gilt leather, 7¼" by 4¾", containing richly printed plates and contributions by Mrs. Sigourney, Miss Mary Ann Browne, Seba Smith, Edgar A. Poe ("Eleonora"), Park Benjamin, and others including "'Murder Will Out'" by W. G. Simms.*

Next smaller in size is THE ANNUALETTE. CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR'S GIFT. EDITED BY A LADY, *published by T. H. Carter and Co. of Boston late in 1843, 5½" by 3½", containing anonymous material including poem charades and a curious story titled "The Juvenile Court Room."*

The fourth volume is a miniature book only 3½ inches tall and 2¼ inches wide. It is called THE LITTLE GEM, A CHRISTMAS, NEW YEAR'S AND BIRTH-DAY PRESENT, *published by John J. Spowers of Brooklyn,*

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probably late in 1844. A short introduction titled "Advertisement" begins: "THIS LITTLE GEM, *consisting of Anecdotes, and short pieces selected principally from some of the late annuals, with five or six original articles, it is believed will be found not unworthy of its name." This tiny book contains an incredible amount of text in its 144 pages of small type, and one of the "anecdotes" — a short short-short story — we now pass on to you as an interesting curiosity out of the past. Actually, as you will see for yourself, it is a mid-nineteenth century variation on one of the oldest and most famous of biblical tales.*

In conclusion, can we do better than to quote the last sentence of the "Advertisement" which prefaces THE LITTLE GEM? — "*The Whole has been prepared with a view to combine pleasure with improvement, and it is hoped will not disappoint the reader.*"

WHICH IS THE HEIR?

(*author unknown*)

A JEWELLER who carried on an extensive trade, and supplied the deficiencies of one country by the superfluities of another, leaving his home with a valuable assortment of diamonds, for a distant region, took with him his son and a young slave, whom he had purchased in his infancy, and had brought up more like an adopted child, than a servant. They performed their intended journey, and the merchant disposed of his commodities with great advantage; but while preparing to return, he was seized by a pestilential distemper, and died suddenly in the metropolis of a foreign country. This accident inspired the slave with a wish to possess his master's treasures, and relying on the total ignorance of strangers, and the kindness everywhere shown him by the jeweller, he declared himself the son of the deceased, and took charge of his property. The true heir, of course, denied his pretensions, and solemnly declared himself to be the only son of the defunct, who had long before purchased his opponent as a slave. This contest produced various opinions. It happened that the slave was a young man of comely person and of polished manners; while the jeweller's son was ill-favored by nature, and still more injured in his education, by the indulgence of his parents. This superiority operated in the minds of many to support the claims of the former; but since no certain evidence could be produced on either side, it became necessary to refer the dispute to a court of law. There, however, from a total want of proofs, nothing could be done. The magistrate declared his inability to decide on unsupported assertions, in which each party was

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equally positive. This caused a report of the case to be made to the prince, who having heard the particulars, was also confounded, and at a loss how to decide the question. At length, a happy thought occurred to the chief of the judges, and he engaged to ascertain the real heir. The two claimants being summoned before him, he ordered them to stand behind a curtain prepared for the occasion, and to project their heads through two openings, when after hearing their several arguments, he would cut off the head of him who should prove to be the slave. This they readily assented to; the one on a reliance on his honesty, the other from a confidence of the impossibility of detection. Accordingly, each taking his place as ordered, thrust his head through a hole in the curtain. An officer stood in front with a drawn cimeter in his hand, and the judge proceeded to the examination. After a short debate, the judge cried out, "Enough, enough, strike off the villain's head!" and the officer, who watched the moment, leaped towards the two youths; the imposter, startled at the brandished weapon, hastily drew back his head, while the jeweller's son, animated by conscious security, stood unmoved. The judge immediately decided for the latter, and ordered the slave to be taken into custody, to receive the punishment due to his diabolical ingratitude.

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These volumes, published by THE AMERICAN MERCURY, which also publishes ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE, have been carefully chosen and edited by a staff of mystery experts. Fans everywhere acclaim Mercury Mystery books as "tops!"

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One of the ten most important books of short stories in the detective genre is R. Austin Freeman's JOHN THORNDYKE'S CASES, *which first appeared in London in 1909. Now, it is a strange thing that despite the cornerstone significance of this book, it took no less than 22 years for an American publisher to bring it out. The book finally appeared in the United States in 1931,* as DR. THORNDYKE'S CASES.

The London first edition contains a short Preface by Dr. Freeman. When the American publisher decided to print the book 22 years later, the Preface was omitted. Did the American publisher feel that the author's Preface of 1909 would sound dated in 1931? Let us quote:

"The primary function of all fiction is to furnish entertainment to the reader, and this fact has not been lost sight of [in this collection]. But the interest of so-called 'detective' fiction is, I believe, greatly enhanced by a careful adherence to the probable, and a strict avoidance of physical impossibilities; and, in accordance with this belief, I have been scrupulous in confining myself to authentic facts and practicable methods. The stories have, for the most part, a medico-legal motive, and the methods of solution are similar to those employed in actual practice by medical jurists."

Do Dr. Freeman's principles of technique strike you as old-fashioned or passé or even faded? Indeed not! Dr. Freeman's approach to "so-called 'detective' fiction" is sounder today than ever before. As a matter of fact, there is not a contemporary crime writer (including yours truly) who would not benefit immensely from reading Dr. Freeman's 1909 Preface once daily and twice on holidays.

The story by Dr. Freeman which we now give you dates back to 1918. It is in the "inverted" style invented by Dr. Freeman in THE SINGING BONE *(1912), and thus illustrates the Freeman Doctrine even more rigorously. It is also the only Dr. Thorndyke short story which, so far as we know, has never been published in the United States.*

THE MISSING MORTGAGEE

by R. AUSTIN FREEMAN

1. *The Story of the Crime*

EARLY in the afternoon of a warm, humid November day Thomas Elton sauntered dejectedly along the Margate esplanade, casting an eye now on the slate-colored sea with its pall of slate-colored sky, and now on the harbor, where the ebb tide was just beginning to expose the mud. It was a dreary prospect, and Elton varied it by observing the few fishermen and fewer promenaders who walked foot to foot with their dis-

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torted reflections in the wet pavement; and thus it was that his eye fell on a smartly-dressed man who had just stepped into a shelter to light a cigar.

Now, something in the aspect of the broad back that was presented to his view, in that of the curly, black hair and the exuberant raiment, suggested to Elton a suspicion of disagreeable familiarity. The man backed out of the shelter, diffusing azure clouds, and, drawing an envelope from his pocket, read something that was written on it. Then he turned quickly — and so did Elton, but not quickly enough. For he was a solitary figure on that bald and empty expanse, and the other had seen him at the first glance. Elton walked away slowly, but he had not gone a dozen paces when he felt the anticipated slap on the shoulder and heard the too well-remembered voice.

"Blow me, if I don't believe you were trying to cut me, Tom," it said.

Elton looked round with ill-assumed surprise.

"Hallo, Gordon! Who the deuce would have thought of seeing you here?"

Gordon laughed thickly. "Not you, apparently; and you don't look as pleased as you might now that you have seen me. Whereas I'm delighted to see you, and especially to see that things are going so well with you."

"What do you mean?" asked Elton sullenly.

"Taking your winter holiday by the sea, like a blooming duke."

"I'm not taking a holiday," said Elton. "I was so worn out that I had to have some sort of change; but I've brought my work down with me, and I put in a full eight hours every day."

"That's right," said Gordon. "'Consider the ant.' Nothing like steady industry. I've brought my work down with me too; a little slip of paper with a stamp on it. You know the article, Tom."

"I know. But it isn't due till tomorrow, is it?"

"Isn't it, by gum! It's due this very day, the twentieth of the month. That's why I'm here. Knowing your little weakness in the matter of dates, and having a small item to collect in Canterbury, I thought I'd just come on and save you the useless expense that results from forgetfulness."

Elton understood the hint, and his face grew rigid.

"I can't do it, Gordon; I can't really. Haven't got it, and shan't have it until I'm paid for the batch of drawings I'm working on now."

"Oh, what a pity!" exclaimed Gordon. "Here you are, blueing your capital on seaside jaunts and reducing your income at a stroke by a clear four pounds a year."

"How do you make that out?" demanded Elton.

"Tut, tut," protested Gordon, "what an unbusinesslike chap you are! Here's a little matter of twenty pounds — a quarter's interest. If it's paid now, it's twenty. If it isn't, it goes on to the principal, and there's another four pounds a year to be

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paid. Why don't you try to be more economical, dear boy?"

Elton looked askance at the vampire by his side; at the plump, blue-shaven cheeks, the thick black eyebrows, and the full, red lips that embraced the cigar, and though he was a mild-tempered man he felt that he could have battered that sensual, complacent face out of all human likeness with something uncommonly like enjoyment. But of these thoughts nothing appeared in his reply, for a man cannot afford to say all he would wish to a creditor who could ruin him with a word.

"You mustn't be too hard on me, Gordon," said he. "Give me a little time. I'm doing all I can, you know. I earn every penny that I am able, and I have kept my insurance paid up regularly. I shall be paid for this work in a week or two and then we can settle up."

Gordon made no immediate reply, and the two men walked slowly eastward, a curiously ill-assorted pair: the one prosperous, jaunty, overdressed; the other pale and dejected, and, with his well-brushed but napless clothes, his patched boots and shiny-brimmed hat, the very type of decent, struggling poverty.

They had just passed the pier and were coming to the base of the jetty when Gordon next spoke.

"Can't we get off this beastly wet pavement?" he asked, looking down at his dainty and highly-polished boots. "What's it like down on the sands?"

"Oh, it's very good walking," said Elton, "between here and Foreness, and probably drier than the pavement."

"Then," said Gordon, "I vote we go down"; and accordingly they descended the sloping way beyond the jetty. The stretch of sand left by the retiring tide was as smooth and firm as a sheet of asphalt, and far more pleasant to walk upon.

"We seem to have the place all to ourselves," remarked Gordon, "with the exception of some half-dozen dukes like yourself."

As he spoke, Gordon changed over from one arm to the other the heavy fur-lined overcoat that he was carrying. "Needn't have brought this beastly thing," he remarked, "if I'd known it was going to be so warm."

"Shall I carry it for you a little way?" asked the naturally polite Elton.

"If you would, dear boy," replied Gordon. "It's difficult to manage an overcoat, an umbrella and a cigar all at once."

He handed over the coat with a sigh of relief. Presently their footsteps led them to the margin of the weed-covered rocks, and here, from under a high heap of bladder-wrack, a large green shore crab rushed out and menaced them with uplifted claws. Gordon stopped and stared at the creature with Cockney surprise, prodding it with his umbrella, and speculating aloud as to whether it was good to eat. The crab, as if alarmed at the suggestion, suddenly darted

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away and began to scuttle over the green-clad rocks, finally plunging into a large, deep pool. Gordon pursued it, hobbling awkwardly over the slippery rocks, until he came to the edge of the pool, over which he stooped, raking inquisitively among the weedy fringe with his umbrella. He was so much interested in his quarry that he failed to allow for the slippery surface on which he stood. The result was disastrous. Of a sudden, one foot began to slide forward, and when he tried to recover his balance, was instantly followed by the other. For a moment he struggled frantically to regain his footing, executing a sort of splashing, stamping dance on the margin. Then, the circling sea birds were startled by a yell of terror, an ivory-handled umbrella flew across the rocks, and Mr. Gordon took a complete header into the deepest part of the pool. What the crab thought of it history does not relate. What Mr. Gordon thought of it is not suitable for publication; he rose looking like an extremely up-to-date merman.

"It's a good job you brought your overcoat, after all," Elton remarked. Gordon made no reply but staggered towards the hospitable overcoat, holding out his dripping arms. Having inducted him into the garment and buttoned him up, Elton hurried off to recover the umbrella and, having secured it, angled with it for the smart billycock which was floating across the pool.

It was surprising what a change the last minute or two had wrought. The positions of the two men were now quite reversed. Despite his shabby clothing, Elton seemed to walk quite jauntily as compared with his shuddering companion, who trotted by his side with short, miserable steps, shrinking into the uttermost depths of his enveloping coat, like an alarmed winkle into its shell, puffing out his cheeks and anathematizing the Universe in general.

They hurried along towards the slope by the jetty when, suddenly, Elton asked: "What are you going to do, Gordon? You can't travel like that."

"Can't you lend me a change?" asked Gordon.

Elton reflected. He had another suit, his best suit, which he had been careful to preserve in good condition for use on those occasions when a decent appearance was indispensable. He looked askance at the man by his side and something told him that the treasured suit would probably receive less careful treatment than it was accustomed to. Still the man couldn't be allowed to go about in wet clothes.

"I've got a spare suit," he said. "It isn't quite up to your style, and may not be much of a fit, but I daresay you'll be able to put up with it for an hour or two."

"It'll be dry anyhow," mumbled Gordon, "so we won't trouble about the style. How far is it to your rooms?"

The plural number was superfluous. Elton's room was in a little ancient

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flint house at the bottom of a narrow close in the old quarter of the town. You reached it without any formal preliminaries of bell or knocker by simply letting yourself in by a street door, crossing a tiny room, opening the door of what looked like a narrow cupboard, and squeezing up a diminutive flight of stairs, which was unexpectedly exposed to view. By following this procedure the two men reached a small bed-sitting-room; that is to say, it was a bedroom, but by sitting down on the bed, you converted it into a sitting-room.

Gordon puffed out his cheeks and looked round distastefully.

"You might ring for some hot water, old chappie," he said.

Elton laughed aloud. "Ring!" he exclaimed. "Ring what? Your clothes are the only things that are likely to get wrung."

"Well, then, sing out for the servant," said Gordon.

Elton laughed again. "My dear fellow," said he, "we don't go in for servants. I look after my room myself. You'll be all right if you have a good rubdown."

Gordon groaned, and emerged reluctantly from the depths of his overcoat, while Elton brought forth from the chest of drawers the promised suit and the necessary undergarments. One of these latter Gordon held up with a sour smile, as he regarded it with extreme disfavor.

"I shouldn't think," said he, "you need have been at the trouble of marking them so plainly. No one's likely to want to run away with them."

The undergarments certainly contrasted very unfavorably with the delicate garments which he was peeling off, excepting in one respect; they were dry; and that had to console him for the ignominious change.

The clothes fitted quite fairly, notwithstanding the difference between the figures of the two men; for while Gordon was a slender man grown fat, Elton was a broad man grown thin; which, in a way, averaged their superficial area.

Elton watched the process of investment and noted the caution with which Gordon smuggled the various articles from his own pockets into those of the borrowed garments without exposing them to view; heard the jingle of money; saw the sumptuous gold watch and massive chain transplanted, and noted with interest the large leather wallet that came forth from the breast pocket of the wet coat. He got a better view of this from the fact that Gordon himself examined it narrowly, and even opened it to inspect its contents.

"Lucky that wasn't an ordinary pocket-book," he remarked. "If it had been, your receipt would have got wet, and so would one or two other little articles that wouldn't have been improved by salt water. And, talking of the receipt, Tom, shall I hand it over now?"

"You can if you like," said Elton; "but as I told you, I haven't got the money." On which Gordon muttered:

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"Pity, pity," and thrust the wallet into his, or rather, Elton's breast pocket.

A few minutes later the two men came out together into the gathering darkness, and as they walked slowly up the close, Elton asked: "Are you going up to town tonight, Gordon?"

"How can I?" was the reply. "I can't go without my clothes. No, I shall run over to Broadstairs. A client of mine keeps a boarding-house there. He'll have to put me up for the night, and if you can get my clothes cleaned and dried I can come over for them tomorrow."

These arrangements having been settled, the two men adjourned, at Gordon's suggestion, for tea at one of the restaurants on the Front; and after that, again at Gordon's suggestion, they set forth together along the cliff path that leads to Broadstairs by way of Kingsgate.

"You may as well walk with me into Broadstairs," said Gordon; "I'll stand you the fare back." And to this Elton agreed, not because he was desirous of the other man's company, but because he still had some lingering hopes of being able to adjust the little difficulty respecting the installment.

"Look here, Gordon," he said at length, "can't you manage to give me a bit more time to pay up this installment? It doesn't seem quite fair to keep sending up the principal like this."

"Well, dear boy," replied Gordon, "it's your own fault, you know. If you would only bear the dates in mind it wouldn't happen."

"But," pleaded Elton, "just consider what I'm paying you. I originally borrowed fifty pounds from you, and I'm now paying you eighty pounds a year in addition to the insurance premium. That's close on a hundred a year; just about half what I manage to earn. If you stick it up any farther you won't leave me enough to keep body and soul together; which really means that I shan't be able to pay you at all."

There was a brief pause; then Gordon said dryly:

"You talk about not paying, dear boy, as if you had forgotten about that promissory note."

Elton set his teeth. His temper was rising rapidly. But he restrained himself.

"I should have a pretty poor memory if I had," he replied, "considering the number of reminders you've given me."

"You've needed them, Tom," said the other. "I've never met a slacker man in keeping to his engagements."

At this Elton lost his temper completely.

"That's a lie!" he exclaimed, "and you know it, you infernal, dirty, blood-sucking parasite!"

Gordon stopped dead.

"Look here, my friend," said he; "none of that. If I've any of your sauce, I'll give you a sound good hammering."

"The deuce you will!" said Elton, whose fingers were itching, not for the

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first time, to take some recompense for all that he had suffered from the insatiable usurer. "Nothing's preventing you now, you know, but I fancy twenty per cent. is more in your line than fighting."

"Give me any more and you'll see," said Gordon.

"Very well," was the quiet rejoinder. "I have great pleasure in informing you that you are a human mawworm. How does that suit you?"

For reply, Gordon threw down his overcoat and umbrella on the grass at the side of the path, and deliberately slapped Elton on the cheek.

The reply followed instantly in the form of a smart left-hander, which took effect on the bridge of Gordon's nose. Thus the battle was fairly started, and it proceeded with all the fury of accumulated hatred on the one side and sharp physical pain on the other. What little science there was appertained to Elton, in spite of which, however, he had to give way to his heavier, better nourished, and more excitable opponent. Regardless of the punishment he received, the infuriated Gordon rushed at him and, by sheer weight of onslaught, drove him backward across the little green.

Suddenly, Elton, who knew the place by daylight, called out in alarm.

"Look out, Gordon! Get back, you fool!"

But Gordon, blind with fury, and taking this as a maneuver to escape, only pressed him harder. Elton's pugnacity died out instantly in mortal terror. He shouted out another warning and, as Gordon still pressed him, battering furiously, he did the only thing that was possible: he dropped to the ground. And then, in the twinkling of an eye, came the catastrophe. Borne forward by his own momentum, Gordon stumbled over Elton's prostrate body, staggered forward a few paces, and fell. Elton heard a muffled groan that faded quickly and mingled with the sound of falling earth and stones. He sprang to his feet and looked round and saw that he was alone.

For some moments he was dazed by the suddenness of the awful thing that had happened. He crept timorously towards the unseen edge of the cliff, and listened. But there was no sound save the distant surge of the breakers, and the scream of an invisible sea-bird. It was useless to try to look over. Near as he was, he could not, even now, distinguish the edge of the cliff from the dark beach below. Suddenly he thought of a narrow cutting that led down from the cliff to the shore. Quickly crossing the green, and mechanically stooping to pick up Gordon's overcoat and umbrella, he made his way to the head of the cutting and ran down the rough chalk roadway. At the bottom he turned to the right.

Soon there loomed up against the murky sky the shadowy form of the little headland on which he and Gordon had stood; and almost at the same moment there grew out of the darkness of the beach a darker spot amid a constellation of smaller

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spots of white. As he drew nearer the dark spot took shape: a horrid shape with sprawling limbs and a head strangely awry. He stepped forward, trembling, and spoke the name the thing had borne. He grasped the flabby hand, and laid his fingers on the wrist; but it only told him the same tale as did that strangely misplaced head. The body lay face downwards, and he had not the courage to turn it over; but that his enemy was dead he had not the faintest doubt. He stood up amidst the litter of fallen chalk and earth and looked down at the horrible, motionless thing, wondering numbly and vaguely what he should do. Should he go and seek assistance? The answer to that came in another question. How came that body to be lying on the beach? And what answer should he give to the inevitable questions?

A minute later, a panic-stricken man stole with stealthy swiftness up the narrow cutting and set forth towards Margate.

Little sleep was there that night for Elton in his room in the old flint house. The dead man's clothes, which greeted him on his arrival, hanging limply on the towel-horse where he had left them, haunted him through the night. In the darkness the sour smell of damp cloth assailed him with an endless reminder of their presence, and after each brief doze, he would start up in alarm and hastily light his candle; only to throw its flickering light on those dank, drowned-looking vestments. His thoughts, half-controlled, as night thoughts are, flitted erratically from the unhappy past to the unstable present, and thence to the incalculable future. Once he lighted the candle specially to look at his watch to see if the tide had yet crept up to that solitary figure on the beach; nor could he rest again until the time of highwater was well past. And all through these wanderings of his thoughts there came, recurring like a horrible refrain, the question, what would happen when the body was found? Could he be connected with it and, if so, would he be charged with murder? At last he fell asleep and slumbered on until the landlady thumped at the staircase door to announce that she had brought his breakfast.

As soon as he was dressed he went out. He went straight on down to the beach; with what purpose he could hardly have said, but an irresistible impulse drove him thither to see if it was there. He went down by the jetty and struck out eastward over the smooth sand, looking about him with dreadful expectation for some small crowd or hurrying messenger.

It was less than half an hour later that the fatal headland opened out beyond Whiteness. Not a soul had he met along that solitary beach, and though, once or twice, he had started at the sight of some mass of driftwood or heap of seaweed, the dreadful thing he was seeking had not yet appeared. He passed the opening of

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the cutting and approached the headland, breathing fast and looking about him fearfully.

Then, rounding the headland, he came in sight of a black hole at the cliff foot, the entrance to a deep cave. He approached yet more slowly, sweeping his eye round the little bay, and looking apprehensively at the cavity before him. Suppose the thing should have washed in there. It was quite possible. Many things did wash into that cave, for he had once visited it and had been astonished at the quantity of seaweed and jetsam that had accumulated within it. But it was an uncomfortable thought. It would be doubly horrible to meet the awful thing in the dim twilight of the cavern. And yet, the black archway seemed to draw him on, step by step, until he stood at the portal and looked in. It was an eerie place, chilly and damp, the clammy walls and roof stained green and purple, and black with encrusting lichens.

At first he could see nothing but the smooth sand near the opening; then, as his eyes grew more accustomed to the gloom, he could make out the great heap of seaweed on the floor of the cave. Insensibly, he crept in, with his eyes riveted on the weedy mass and, as he left the daylight behind him, so did the twilight of the cave grow clearer. His feet left the firm sand and trod the springy mass of weed.

And then, in an instant, he saw it. From a heap of weed, a few paces ahead, projected a boot: his own boot. He recognized the patch on the sole; and at the sight his heart seemed to stand still. Though he had somehow expected to find it here, its presence seemed to strike him with a greater shock of horror from that very circumstance.

How long would the body lie here undiscovered? And what would happen when it was found? What was there to connect him with it? Of course, there was his name on the clothing, but there was nothing incriminating in that, if he had only had the courage to give information at once. But it was too late to think of that now. Besides, it suddenly flashed upon him, there was the receipt in the wallet. That receipt mentioned him by name and referred to a loan. Obviously, its suggestion was most sinister, coupled with his silence. It was a deadly item of evidence against him. But no sooner had he realized the appalling significance of this document than he also realized that it was still within his reach. Why should he leave it there to be brought in evidence — in false evidence, too — against him?

Slowly he began to lift the slimy, tangled weed. As he drew aside the first bunch, he gave a gasp of horror and quickly replaced it. The body was lying on its back and as he lifted the weed, he had uncovered — not the face, for the thing had no face. It had struck either the cliff or a stone upon the beach and — but there is no need to go into particulars: it had no face. When he had recovered a little, Elton

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groped shudderingly among the weed until he found the breast-pocket from which he quickly drew out the wallet, now clammy and sodden.

Elton stood up and took a deep breath. He resolved instantly to take out and destroy the receipt and put back the wallet. But this was easier thought of than done. The receipt was soaked with sea-water, and refused utterly to light when he applied a match to it. In the end he tore it up into little fragments and deliberately swallowed them, one by one.

But to restore the wallet was more than he was equal to just now. The receipt was gone now, and with it the immediate suggestion of motive. There remained only the clothes with their too legible markings. They certainly connected him with the body, but they offered no proof of his presence at the catastrophe. And then, suddenly, another idea occurred to him. Who could identify the body — the body that had no face? There was the wallet, it was true, but he could take that away with him; and there was a ring on the finger, and some articles in the pockets which might be identified. But these things were removable, too. And if he removed them, what then? Why, then, the body was that of Thomas Elton, a friendless, poverty-stricken artist.

He pondered on this new situation profoundly. It offered him a choice of alternatives. Either he might choose the imminent risk of being hanged for a murder that he had not committed, or he might surrender his identity forever and move away to a new environment.

He smiled faintly. His identity! What might that be worth to barter against his life? Only yesterday he would gladly have surrendered it as the bare price of emancipation from the vampire who had fastened on to him.

He thrust the wallet into his pocket and buttoned his coat.

"Thomas Elton" was dead.

II: Dr. Thorndyke's Investigation

From various causes the insurance business that passed through Dr. Thorndyke's hands had, of late, considerably increased. The number of companies which regularly employed him had grown larger, and, since the remarkable case of Percival Bland,* the "Griffin" had made it a routine practice to send all inquest cases to us for report.

It was in reference to one of these that Mr. Stalker, a senior member of the staff of that office, called on us one afternoon in December.

"I've brought you another inquest case," said he; "a rather queer one, quite interesting from your point of view. As far as we can see, it has no particular interest for us excepting that it does rather look as if our examining medical officer had been a little casual.

"On the 24th of last month some men who were collecting seaweed, to

*See *Percival Bland's Proxy* in the Spring 1942 issue of *EQMM*.

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use as manure, discovered in a cave at Kingsgate in the Isle of Thanet the body of a man, lying under a mass of accumulated weed. As the tide was rising, they put the body into their cart and conveyed it to Margate, where, of course, an inquest was held, and the following facts were elicited. The body was that of a man named Thomas Elton. It was identified by the name-marks on the clothing, by the visiting-cards and a couple of letters which were found in the pockets. From the address on the letters, it was seen that Elton had been staying in Margate, and on inquiry at that address, it was learned from the old woman who let the lodgings that he had been missing about four days. The landlady was taken to the mortuary, and at once identified the body as that of her lodger. It remained only to decide how the body came into the cave; and this did not seem to present much difficulty; for the neck had been broken by a tremendous blow, which had practically destroyed the face, and there were distinct evidences of a breaking away of a portion of the top of the cliff, only a few yards from the position of the cave. There was apparently no doubt that Elton had fallen sheer from the top of the overhanging cliff onto the beach. Now, one would suppose with the evidence of this fall of about a hundred and fifty feet, the smashed face, and broken neck, there was not much room for doubt as to the cause of death. I think you will agree with me, Dr. Jervis?"

"Certainly," I replied; "it must be admitted that a broken neck is a condition that tends to shorten life."

"Quite so," agreed Stalker; "but our friend, the local coroner, is a gentleman who takes nothing for granted — a very Thomas Didymus, who apparently agrees with Dr. Thorndyke that if there is no post-mortem, there is no inquest. So he ordered a post-mortem, which would have appeared to me an absurdly unnecessary proceeding, as I think even you will agree with me, Dr. Thorndyke."

But Thorndyke shook his head.

"Not at all," said he. "It might, for instance, be much easier to push a drugged or poisoned man over a cliff than to put over the same man in his normal state. The appearance of violent accident is an excellent mask for the less obvious forms of murder."

"That's perfectly true," said Stalker; "and I suppose that is what the coroner thought. At any rate, he had the post-mortem made, and the result was most curious; for it was found, on opening the body, that the deceased had suffered from a smallish thoracic aneurism, which had burst. Now, as the aneurism must obviously have burst during life, it leaves the cause of death — so I understand — uncertain; at any rate, the medical witness was unable to say whether the deceased fell over the cliff in consequence of the bursting of the aneurism or burst the aneurism in consequence of falling over the cliff. Of course, it doesn't matter to us

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which way the thing happened; the only question which interests us is, whether a comparatively recently insured man ought to have had an aneurism at all."

"Have you paid the claim?" asked Thorndyke.

"No, certainly not. We never pay a claim until we have had your report. But, as a matter of fact, there is another circumstance that is causing delay. It seems that Elton had mortgaged his policy to a money-lender, named Gordon, and it is by him that the claim has been made — or rather, by a clerk of his, named Hyams. Now, we have had a good many dealings with this man, Gordon, and hitherto he has always acted in person; and as he is a somewhat slippery gentleman, we have thought it desirable to have the claim actually signed by him. And that is the difficulty. For it seems that Mr. Gordon is abroad, and his whereabouts unknown to Hyams; so, as we certainly couldn't take Hyams's receipt for payment, the matter is in abeyance until Hyams can communicate with his principal. And now, I must be running away. I have brought you, as you will see, all the papers, including the policy and the mortgage deed."

As soon as he was gone, Thorndyke gathered up the bundle of papers and sorted them out in what he apparently considered the order of their importance.

"The medical evidence," he remarked, "is very full and complete. Both the coroner and the doctor seem to know their business."

"Seeing that the man apparently fell over a cliff," said I, "the medical evidence would not seem to be of first importance. It would seem to be more to the point to ascertain how he came to fall over."

"That's quite true," replied Thorndyke; "and yet, this report contains some rather curious matter. The deceased had an aneurism of the arch; that was probably rather recent. But he also had some slight, old-standing aortic disease, with full compensory hypertrophy. He also had a nearly complete set of false teeth. Now, doesn't it strike you, Jervis, as rather odd that a man who was passed only five years ago as a first-class life, should, in that short interval, have become actually uninsurable?"

"It certainly does look," said I, "as if the fellow had had rather bad luck. What does the proposal form say?"

I took the document up and ran my eyes over it. On Thorndyke's advice, medical examiners for the "Griffin" were instructed to make a somewhat fuller report than is usual in some companies. In this case, the ordinary answers set forth that the heart was perfectly healthy and the teeth exceptionally good, and then, in the summary at the end, the examiner remarked: "the proposer seems to be a completely sound and healthy man; he presents no physical defects whatever, with the exception of a bony ankylosis of the first joint of the

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third finger of the left hand, which he states to have been due to an injury."

Thorndyke looked up quickly. "Which finger, did you say?" he asked.

"The third finger of the left hand," I replied.

Thorndyke looked thoughtfully at the paper that he was reading. "It's very singular," said he, "for I see that the Margate doctor states that the deceased wore a signet ring on the third finger of the left hand. Now, of course, you couldn't get a ring onto a finger with bony ankylosis of the joint."

I admitted that it was very singular indeed, and we then resumed our study of the respective papers. But presently I noticed that Thorndyke had laid the report upon his knee.

"If we take the small and unimpressive items and add them together," he said, after a few moments, "you will see that a quite considerable sum of discrepancy results. Thus:

"*In 1903 Thomas Elton, aged thirty-one, had a set of sound teeth. In 1908, at the age of thirty-six, he was more than half toothless.*

"*Again, at the age of thirty-one, his heart was perfectly healthy. At the age of thirty-six he had old aortic disease, with fully established compensation, and an aneurism that was possibly due to it.*

"*When he was examined he had a noticeable incurable malformation; no such malformation is mentioned in connection with the body.*

"*He appears to have fallen over a cliff; and he had also burst an aneurism. Now, the bursting of the aneurism must obviously have occurred during life; but it would occasion practically instantaneous death. Therefore, if the fall was accidental, the rupture must have occurred either as he stood at the edge of the cliff, as he was in the act of falling, or on striking the beach.*

"*At the place where he apparently fell, the footpath is some thirty yards distant from the edge of the cliff.*

"*It is not known how he came to that spot, or whether he was alone at the time.*

"*Some one is claiming five hundred pounds as the immediate result of his death.*

"There, you see, Jervis, are seven propositions, none of them extremely striking, but rather suggestive when taken together."

"You seem," said I, "to suggest a doubt as to the identity of the body."

"I do," he replied. "The identity was not clearly established."

"And the old woman —" I suggested, but he interrupted me.

"My dear Jervis," he exclaimed; "I'm surprised at you. How many times has it happened within our knowledge that women have identified the bodies of total strangers as those of their husbands, fathers, or brothers. The thing happens almost every year. As to this old woman, she saw a body with an unrecognizable face, dressed in the clothes of her missing lodger. Of course, it was the clothes that she identified."

"I suppose it was," I agreed; and

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then I said: "You seem to suggest the possibility of foul play."

"Well," he replied, "if you consider those seven points, you will agree with me that they present a cumulative discrepancy which it is impossible to ignore.

"Then," he continued, after a pause, "there is this mortgage deed. It looks quite regular and is correctly stamped, but it seems to me that the surface of the paper is slightly altered in one or two places, and if one holds the document up to the light, the paper looks a little more transparent in those places." He examined the document for a few seconds with his pocket lens, and then passing lens and document to me, said: "Have a look at it, Jervis, and tell me what you think."

I scrutinized the paper closely, taking it over to the window to get a better light; and to me, also, the paper appeared to be changed in certain places.

"Are we agreed as to the position of the altered places?" Thorndyke asked.

"I only see three patches," I answered. "Two correspond to the name, Thomas Elton, and the third to one of the figures in the policy number."

"Exactly," said Thorndyke, "and the significance is obvious. If the paper has really been altered, it means that some other name has been erased and Elton's substituted; by which arrangement, of course, the correctly dated stamp would be secured. And this — the alteration of an old document — is the only form of forgery that is possible with a dated, impressed stamp."

"Wouldn't it be rather a stroke of luck?" I asked, "for a forger to happen to have in his possession a document needing only these two alterations?"

"I see nothing remarkable in it," Thorndyke replied. "A money-lender would have a number of documents of this kind in hand, and you observe that he was not bound down to any particular date. Any date within a year or so of the issue of the policy would answer his purpose. This document is, in fact, dated, as you see, about six months after the issue of the policy."

"I suppose," said I, "that you will draw Stalker's attention to this matter."

"He will have to be informed, of course," Thorndyke replied: "but I think it would be interesting in the first place to call on Mr. Hyams. You will have noticed that there are some rather mysterious features in this case, and Mr. Hyams' conduct suggests that he may have some special information." He glanced at his watch and after a few moments' reflection added: "I don't see why we shouldn't make our little ceremonial call at once."

Mr. Hyams was "discovered," as the playwrights have it, in a small office at the top of a high building in Queen Victoria Street. He was a small gentleman, of sallow and greasy aspect, with heavy eyebrows.

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"Are you Mr. Gordon?" Thorndyke suavely inquired as we entered.

Mr. Hyams seemed to experience a momentary doubt on the subject, but finally decided that he was not. "But perhaps," he added brightly, "I can help you."

"I daresay you can," Thorndyke agreed significantly; on which we were conducted into an inner den.

"Now," said Mr. Hyams, shutting the door ostentatiously, "what can I do for you?"

"I want you," Thorndyke replied, "to answer one or two questions with reference to the claim made by you on the 'Griffin' Office in respect of Thomas Elton."

Mr. Hyams's manner underwent a sudden change. He began rapidly to turn over papers, and opened and shut the drawers of his desk, with an air of restless preoccupation.

"Did the 'Griffin' people send you here?" he demanded brusquely.

Thorndyke produced a card and laid it on the table. Mr. Hyams had apparently seen the name before, for he suddenly grew rather pale and very serious.

"What is the nature of the questions that you wished to ask?" he inquired.

"They refer to this claim," replied Thorndyke. "The first question is, where is Mr. Gordon?"

"I don't know," said Hyams.

"Where do you think he is?" asked Thorndyke.

"I don't think at all," replied Hyams, turning a shade paler and looking everywhere but at Thorndyke.

"Very well," said the latter, "then the next question is, are you satisfied that this claim is really payable?"

"I shouldn't have made it if I hadn't been," replied Hyams.

"Quite so," said Thorndyke; "and the third question is, are you satisfied that the mortgage deed was executed as it purports to have been?"

"I can't say anything about that," replied Hyams, who was growing every moment paler and more fidgety. "It was done before my time."

"Thank you," said Thorndyke. "You will, of course, understand why I am making these inquiries."

"I don't," said Hyams.

"Then," said Thorndyke, "perhaps I had better explain. We are dealing, Mr. Hyams, with the case of a man who has met with a violent death under somewhat mysterious circumstances. We are dealing, also, with another man who has disappeared, leaving his affairs to take care of themselves; and with a claim, put forward by a *third* party, on behalf of the one man in respect of the other. When I say that the dead man has been imperfectly identified, and that the document supporting the claim presents certain peculiarities, you will see that the matter certainly calls for further inquiry."

There was an appreciable interval of silence. Mr. Hyams had turned a tallowy white, and looked furtively about the room, as if anxious to avoid the stony gaze of my colleague.

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"Can you give us no assistance?" Thorndyke inquired, at length. Mr. Hyams chewed a pen-holder ravenously, as he considered the question. At length, he burst out in an agitated voice: "Look here, sir, if I tell you what I know, will you treat the information as confidential?"

"I can't agree to that, Mr. Hyams," replied Thorndyke. "It might amount to compounding a felony. But you will be wiser to tell me what you know. The document is a side-issue, which my clients may never raise, and my own concern is with the death."

Hyams looked distinctly relieved. "If that's so," said he, "I'll tell you all I know, which is precious little, and which just amounts to this: Two days after Elton was killed, someone came to this office in my absence and opened the safe. I discovered the fact the next morning. Someone had rummaged over all the papers. It wasn't Gordon, because he knew where to find everything; and it wasn't an ordinary thief because no cash or valuables had been taken. In fact, the only thing that I missed was a promissory note, drawn by Elton."

"You didn't miss a mortgage deed?" suggested Thorndyke, and Hyams, having snatched a little further refreshment from the pen-holder, said he did not.

"And the policy," suggested Thorndyke, "was apparently not taken?"

"No," replied Hyams; "but it was looked for. Three bundles of policies had been untied, but this one happened to be in a drawer of my desk and I had the only key."

"And what do you infer from this visit?" Thorndyke asked.

"Well," replied Hyams, "the safe was opened with keys, and they were Gordon's keys — or, at any rate, they weren't mine — and the person who opened it wasn't Gordon; and the thing that was taken concerned only Elton. Naturally I smelled a rat; and when I read of the finding of the body, I smelled a fox."

An exhumation, consequent on Thorndyke's challenge of the identity of the deceased, showed that the body was that of Gordon. A hundred pounds reward was offered for information as to Elton's whereabouts. But no one ever earned it. A letter, bearing the postmark of Marseilles, and addressed by the missing man to Thorndyke, gave a plausible account of Gordon's death; which was represented as having occurred accidentally at the moment when Gordon chanced to be wearing a suit of Elton's clothes.

Of course, this account may have been correct, or again, it may have been false; but whether it was true or false, Elton, from that moment, vanished from our ken and has never since been heard of.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

In last year's contest we awarded no less than eleven special prizes for "first stories" — by new writers who will have their baptism in print in the pages of EQMM. We will bring you one of these "first stories" in this issue and in each of the ten issues to follow, beginning with the story we considered the best "first story" of the year.

The author, Thomas James Flanagan, was born on November 5, 1923, in Greenwich, Connecticut. He was not quite 25 years old when he submitted "The Fine Italian Hand." Mr. Flanagan attended Amherst College, and earned his M.A. at Columbia University. During the last war (and we hope it was the last war), he served on a landing ship in the Pacific theatre.

"The Fine Italian Hand" was written during two hectic hours on the hottest Saturday afternoon of last summer's heat wave. Mr. Flanagan tried to sleep in his apartment, but it was too hot; he went outdoors and tried to sleep in a Park, but there were too many mosquitoes. He tried to concentrate on a critical essay he was then in the process of writing, but it was too exhausting. Finally, he started to walk home, and in the shimmering haze caused by the heat he saw a vision of two men, in medieval dress, walking down the corridor of a fortress. One man was huge, leonine; the other was thin and subservient. With a magical clarity the story fell into shape in about three city blocks of slow walking, and Mr. Flanagan, in something of a trance not altogether owing to the heat, went home and typed the story without a single pause, even for liquid refreshment. He didn't realize that it was a "locked room" detective story until your Editors pointed it out to him.

It is irrelevant to note that the heat wave broke one week after the writing of "The Fine Italian Hand"; but it is not irrelevant to note that while his first detective story was born in white-heat, Mr. Flanagan is acutely conscious of the probability that his second story will have to be hammered out the hard way — in cold sweat . . .

THE FINE ITALIAN HAND

by THOMAS FLANAGAN

As he padded down the stone-flagged passage beside the tall, erect figure of Count Montagno, the Duke's messenger looked meager and inadequate, his thin body hunched in a frayed crimson robe of court, the

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yellowed skin of his face stretched across sharp cheek-bones and slim shrunken chin.

The corridor, cold with the bone-piercing wind of North Italy, was lit by the wavering torches of the servants who preceded them down the hall.

The Duke's messenger looked with grudging admiration at Count Montagno, the Wolf of the North, the greatest of the *condottieri*. The Duke's messenger, who had known the sallow lupine face of the king of France, who had watched the heavy sullen tread of the Hapsburg, had never felt such fear in the presence of a man. Never but once, and that was the time when he had first met his lord and duke, the terrible Cesare Borgia.

The racing, shadowy flames from the pitch torches showed him now the Count's tall sinewy body, his jutting wolf-like head. The Duke's messenger longed for the quiet of his small room, for the comforting feel of vellum between his fingers. He longed to resumé his translation of Livy. In the turmoil of 14th Century Italy, nothing, the Duke's messenger knew, was needed so badly as quiet, unexciting scholarship. And yet (the Duke's messenger shrugged) here he was running errands between the wolf of the north and the lion of the midlands.

He heard the harsh, soldier-like tones of the man beside him. "You can easily see, my dear sir, that not only your great master, but I myself and those within my liege, are placed in hazard by this theft. France waits beyond the mountains — waiting for the thinnest of excuses with which to justify to the Holy Father an invasion of all Italy — and now this."

By contrast, the voice of the Duke's messenger was cracked and pedantic, flecked with the dust of a hundred libraries. "You could write to his majesty of France. You could explain the theft."

The Count turned and by the glaring light looked down upon the thin messenger. "We have maintained the sovereignty of these states, your master and I, by creating the legend of our strength, of our cunning. And you wish us to tell France that we permitted a foot-soldier, or a major-domo, or a servant, to make off with Borgia's gift to the majesty of France?"

"It would be so simple. Simple and direct. One should never be afraid to confess mistakes. That is a sign of strength, not of weakness."

They had entered the large banqueting hall, where tapers, fixed to the walls, shed a fitful light across the flagging, across the broad oaken tables.

"That is a sign of copybook strength," the Count said, and the low vaulted room echoed with his voice. He held up his thick, sinewed arm. "This is the strength which rules Italy."

The messenger smiled apologetically. "One may learn much from copybooks. Have you read Livy? A very clever man."

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The Count raised his heavy confident shoulders and turned away. "We were feasting in this hall," he said, "I and the Marquis of Villefranche, who was to receive Borgia's gift, and our retinues. I toasted France, with the wine and the words sticking in my throat, and then together, Villefranche and I, we descended the stairs to where the treasure lay under guard."

"Had Villefranche seen the treasure earlier?"

"Yes. That afternoon, before the feast. We had looked at it together, and marveled at —" the Count's eyes raked the Duke's messenger slantwise — "at Borgia's great concern to please France with such gifts."

The messenger shrugged. "Or perhaps wondered at Borgia's great wealth that he should carelessly leave a treasure in cut emeralds under the guard of a border captain."

The Count smiled in angry acknowledgement of the thrust. "You know the rest," he said. "We descended the stairs and found the treasure gone. One of the soldiers guarding it had been killed, and the second wounded."

"Perhaps you should have had more men guarding it."

"Perhaps. Perhaps. You are not a soldier, I take it?"

The messenger smiled primly, pulling down the corners of his thin lips. "Dear, no. I am a man of thought."

"Yes. If you had been a soldier, you would know my position. I have only a few hundred men at Castello Montagno. The rest are foraging the countryside, hunting for food, should we have to sustain a Spring attack from France. This is a poor province, and my noble ally, your great master, is not as generous with his friends as he is with his enemies."

The messenger slipped his frail, blue-veined hands into the sleeves of his robe. "One gains only the Known from one's friends. One's enemies possess the Unknown, and hence should always be courted. But the guards?"

The soldier stared in blunt perplexity at the wizened peasant whom Borgia had sent to receive his report. "Because of this, my dear sir, I used every man as a member of my personal bodyguard, or as a guard at the portcullis, that Villefranche might see them as he rode up. Might see them and be deceived. I even pressed some of the scullery boys into armor."

"That was truly cleverness," the Duke's messenger said. "But had you anticipated a theft, your cleverness might have risen to wisdom."

"I am not a huckster nor a diplomat, nor, pardon my bluntness, a toadying courtier. I know one thing, and I know that well. I know how to fight. When I have sword in hand, when I stand upon the field of action —"

"Your prowess has won you the respect of all Italy," the messenger interrupted. "But it is because of the emeralds that my master has sent me here. He has himself regaled me with tales of your prowess."

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"Indeed?"

"Indeed and indeed." As the messenger looked upon the heavy wolf's-head face, it came to him again how ill-suited he was anywhere but among his books. He shuddered delicately, and drew his robe about him.

"It seemed safe," Montagno said, "and it will seem safe to you." He walked toward a low stone door. "I had three men standing here on guard. Even should they have been overpowered, the thieves would have emerged in full sight of Villefranche and myself and all of our staffs as we sat feasting. Can you not see that?"

"Indeed and indeed," the messenger said.

Montagno flung open the door and signaled to the two torch-bearing attendants. With the messenger following timorously behind, they descended a steep staircase, cut, the messenger guessed, from the very mountain on which Castello Montagno rested. When he had reached the foot of the staircase, he found himself in a low, dark, windowless room, lit only by the torches which they had brought with them.

"This was the room," Montagno said, "and there is but one other entrance to it."

"Ah," the messenger said.

Montagno glared at him contemptuously, and walked with his quick wolf's tread to the far side of the room, with the guards scurrying after him. It seemed to the messenger that he had descended into some infernal pit, into the lair of some animal. He glanced apprehensively behind him, but the door leading to the staircase had been slammed shut from above.

Montagno had placed his strong thick arms on the second door, which was of stone, and had been set inconspicuously into the wall, and pushed outward. Instantly, the room was flooded with sunlight, and the messenger, as he walked toward it understood the Count's snort of contempt.

For the door opened onto space, onto the sky and the sun, and beneath it was a sheer, straight drop of a thousand feet. The messenger found himself staring south where, hidden by the mist and by many miles, his brutal master, Cesare Borgia, was even now waiting for his report. The messenger shuddered, and fingered his long throat apprehensively.

"There you are," the Count said with gloomy satisfaction. "Through the first door, the thieves *did not* leave. Through the second door, the thieves *could not* leave."

"That *is* impossible," the Duke's messenger said. He backed away from the window, overcome by a fit of giddiness, and seated himself on a low stone bench.

"It *is* impossible, my dear sir — but it happened."

"It is impossible, and Villefranche will report that it is impossible," the messenger said, in a low toneless voice. "He will report that the emeralds had never been intended for the majesty of France."

"Yes," the Count said. "That is

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what he would like to report. It is the news which the majesty of France would wish dearly to hear. But you and I know that it is not so."

"Then —" the messenger looked up sharply, and his face, the Count noticed in some alarm, was that of a fox — "then it was a miracle. The emeralds vanished. They were an offering made jointly to the Virgin by Borgia and France. Another order of being, superior to the mortal, entered temporarily into our field of knowledge and then left it, leaving confusion where, had we but been immortal, there would have been pure reason. It is thus, barring my own lamentable ineptitude for metaphysics, that Saint Thomas defines a miracle."

He smiled deprecatingly, and the Count, slamming the door shut, walked toward him.

"Would it not please France to learn," the messenger asked, "that his jewels, above all others, had been marked for heavenly appropriation?"

"No," the Count said forcefully. "It would not."

"I was afraid not," the messenger said disconsolately.

"You are a fool," the Count said, seating himself beside the messenger. "Borgia has sent me a fool."

"In the sight of God the foolish are often the wise. Italy, cursed by war, famine, and plague, has cried for a miracle, and here we may give it to her."

"In the field of war," the Count said, "there is no room for the miraculous. Listen. If the thieves could not or did not leave by either of the doors, then *they did not leave!*"

"But the emeralds —"

"The emeralds left," the Count said. "Not the thieves, but the emeralds. They did not leave by the stairwell door, for that door was well guarded. They must have left by the wall door. They were lowered on rope, on one thousand feet of rope, to the foot of the mountains, and there they were carried off by the accomplices of the thieves."

"But if the thieves did not leave —"

"Then they remained. Is it not clear to you now, book-mouse? When we went into the treasure-room, the two guards, and no one else, were in the room."

"But you said that the guards were dead."

"No. One guard was dead. His head had been severed from his body. The other guard was wounded, but he was not dead. He is not dead now."

The messenger smiled bemusedly at the Count. "Then the second guard, the living one, was the thief?"

"Perhaps, but not of necessity. In war, we examine carefully each possibility. When this room is unlighted, you notice that it is in total darkness. Now, is it not possible that the thieves slipped past the guards, attacked them, lowered the emeralds from the wall-door, then remained in the room until Villefranche and I descended with our staffs, and then, in

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the confusion, mingled themselves among us."

"Only," the messenger said slowly, becoming aware of the Count's meaning, "Only if the thieves were men wearing either your livery or Villefranche's."

"Exactly. There are, then, three possibilities. Either the guards lowered the jewels from the window and then, for a reason which we may learn, fought each other, or else the thieves were men under my orders — or Villefranche's."

"How simple, it becomes so simple," the messenger said. "And this second guard?"

"He was found beside his dead comrade, wounded and almost crazed."

"Too crazed to talk."

"No, not too crazed to talk if he could."

"What do you mean?"

"Nofrio has been with the Montagno family from the moment of his birth. And from that moment he has been a deaf-mute."

The messenger stared at him.

"And now," the Count said, "we may prepare to meet the Marquis of Villefranche and offer to him our solution."

"You have a solution?" the messenger asked, and then stopped to grin. Unlike his usual expression of doleful misery, as though he sucked always upon a persimmon, his grin was oddly youthful. "Of course," he said. "Nofrio can write." He nodded. "We can direct our questions to him and he can write his answer."

"No," the Count said, standing up, and signaling the servants. "He cannot write a word. But still we have our solution."

"Truly," said the Duke's messenger, "one must have the cunning of a wolf."

The Marquis of Villefranche played fretfully with a pom-pom saturated with scent. He could not stand the bestiality of North Italy, nor the savagery of even the nobility. This blunt, grim-visaged warlord, Montagno, for example. Even the tiny shriveled clerk was preferable. He listened attentively, however, to Montagno's words.

If the words were not well-chosen, summer might find Castello Montagno in the hands of the majesty of France. A bagful of emeralds was a small price to pay for a legitimate provocation to war. Perhaps (the Marquis blanched), perhaps it might even be his duty to take Montagno's place in this mouldering tomb.

". . . and such, Villefranche," Montagno was saying, "such is the nature of the problem. You will forgive my suggestion that the theft might have been committed on your orders and by your men, but then, I have accused myself equally. As a man of logic, you will realize that it is merely a formal exercise in which we indulge."

"Yes," said Villefranche languidly, "and all of it depends upon the testimony of an illiterate deaf-mute and a dead man."

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Montagno leaned toward him. They were in the room of justice of Castello Montagno. The Count was seated in his chair of state, which had arm-rests carved in the images of avenging wolves. Villefranche sat beside him and to one side, the Duke's messenger sat docilely upon a plain oaken bench.

"Yes," Montagno said, "the mute is illiterate, but he is not blind."

The pom-pom dropped from Villefranche's hand and rolled to the floor. The Duke's messenger leaped up obsequiously, picked it up, and returned it. Villefranche snatched it petulantly. "What do you mean?"

"Just this. I have had Fra Dominico paint for me a series of pictures. Each picture portrays one of the possibilities. He has merely to signify before us the correct way in which the theft occurred, and we will have our solution. Fra Dominico, who has long known the youth, has managed to convey to him, through signs, the nature of the test. And so, you see, we have no problem."

Villefranche bit his lip, and the Duke's messenger, watching him closely, wondered whether or not his nervousness was caused by fear or indecision.

"But —" Villefranche said finally, "— but he would never incriminate himself."

Montagno grinned that terrible wolfish grin, and Villefranche drew back, not through fear, but through detestation of the vulgar.

"Nofrio has been prepared. You will see. Nofrio will be glad to speak the truth and end his misery, one way or the other."

He nodded to the soldier behind him, who returned presently with a stout, brown-clad monk, who bore with him a number of sketches.

"These are the paintings?"

"The sketches, may it please your lordship." The monk, his art having demanded exactness of speech, drew back apprehensively. The protecting arm of Rome did not reach to the mountains of Castello Montagno.

"The sketches, then." The Count looked up toward the door. When the guards returned, they brought with them what might once have been a man. The guards supported his sagging body. His chest was crisscrossed with lashes, and a terrible scar disfigured his face, running up into the blood-matted hair. Montagno grinned, and looked toward Villefranche. "He has been — prepared."

The messenger winced and turned his eyes away, but Villefranche merely placed the pom-pom against his nostrils.

"I remember," Montagno said, and his voice was heavy and solemn in the room. "I remember when Nofrio was a child playing in the courtyard with the children of Castello Montagno. If he is innocent but can point to the guilty, I will protect him, whomever it incriminates." He gazed steadily at Villefranche. "I want that understood."

"It is understood," Villefranche said.

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Montagno nodded to the monk, who drew forth the first sketch and held it toward Nofrio. It showed Nofrio and his dead comrade backed against the wall of the treasure-room, while soldiers, dressed in the Montagno livery and with drawn swords, carried the sack of emeralds to the wall-window.

"Poor Nofrio must think carefully," the Count said, "for if he nods, then I will have all of my banquet squad executed."

Nofrio pushed his squat, heavy head forward, his wide staring eyes fixed. Then, slowly, he shook his head.

The messenger relaxed, but Villefranche gripped the sides of his chair nervously.

The Count looked carefully at Villefranche, and then motioned again to the monk. The second sketch portrayed much the same picture, save that the soldiers were dressed in the livery of France, the livery of the retinue which had accompanied the Marquis of Villefranche.

"Now here, you see," Montagno said. "We have an interesting situation. An embarrassing one, potentially."

"By God," Villefranche said. "This is an insult not to me but to all France. If your peasant —"

"The innocent fear nothing before God or man," the messenger said in his rusty, pedantic voice, "and they never bother to protest."

Villefranche, his nostrils distended, glared for a moment at the messenger, and then all three men turned toward the prisoner.

"Watch Nofrio," the Count said smoothly. "If the men were French he will nod — and there will be war."

But Nofrio was slowly, positively, shaking his head from side to side.

Villefranche relaxed then, and smiled at Montagno, but the Count's face was that of a man accepting tragedy. Wordlessly, he nodded to the monk, and Fra Dominico held up the third portrait. It was very different, for in this sketch, Nofrio could clearly be seen standing at the wall-window, carefully lowering the sack of emeralds down the perilous mountainside to his unseen accomplices. It was the picture which would represent Nofrio's confession.

"Perhaps," Montagno said, "perhaps for Nofrio this is best of all, for it will end his troubles. He will escape the lash and the boot and the torture by water." The Duke's messenger, watching the Count, saw the face of a man who had looked upon much sorrow.

"Yes," Montagno said. "Nofrio will be set free." He took the torch from a servant behind him and, with the messenger, walked toward the prisoner. Villefranche, and the monk, carrying the third sketch, followed him. He held the torch a scant foot from the staring eyes.

Fra Dominico walked slowly to the prisoner and held the sketch before his wide, vacant, pain-drugged eyes.

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The Count rubbed the back of his hand across a forehead which was sweating in the cold room. "Nofrio will be free," he said.

And then, slowly, sadly, without moving his eyes from the picture before him, Nofrio nodded.

"Man's justice has been done," the messenger said.

Villefranche turned to the Count. "I had not thought to find such wisdom in a soldier."

"One must have the cunning of a wolf," the messenger said, his scrawny hands thrust into the folds of his robe.

Montagno placed his hand on the prisoner's shoulder and then drew it away hastily, as though ashamed of such sentimentality.

He turned to the guards. "Take him out," he said. "See if he will reveal his accomplices. And if he will not, then kill him." He walked ponderously to the chair, his heavy shoulders sagging.

He kept his back turned, but the messenger, the marquis, and the monk stared with terrified fascination as the Count's hand was replaced by the impersonal fingers of the guards.

They carried him backwards from the room, and his heels scraped on the cold stone. But before they had carried him more than a few feet, his mouth moved, and the Duke's messenger found himself staring into Nofrio's distended mouth, with its ragged stump of a tongue. Then, suddenly and horribly, the man released the hideous, jagged scream of the mute, half-animal and wholly inhuman. It emerged for an instant, and then Nofrio was silent and limp, and was taken away.

The Count sat hunched in his chair, his shoulders sagging. Suddenly he was not a great *condottiere*, but a middle-aged man, a landlord. "He played when he was a child in the courtyard of Castello Montagno."

The Marquis, for once stripped of affectation, placed his hand on the Count's. Then, realizing that he had seen the gesture performed recently, he jerked the hand away.

"The majesty of France will know of this," he said, "and that you executed a thief whom you loved in order to demonstrate the integrity of your dealings with France."

He turned and walked from the room, and the Duke's messenger slipped out with him.

"This is a good country," the marquis said, freeing himself from terror by small talk.

"It can become a great one when it is freed from terror," the messenger said. He pressed his lips primly together. "When it is no longer the prey of wolves."

The marquis looked to the north, and in his mind he saw, beyond the mountains, the court of his sovereign. "It will become great when it is unified beneath the banner of France."

But the scrawny messenger looked, with mingled hatred and admiration, toward the south, toward the brutal corrupt court of his master, the lion of the plains, Cesare Borgia. "By an Italian," he said softly.

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Villefranche, once again himself, smiled disdainfully, and fingered his pom-pom. "You are a scholar," he said, "and live only with the abstract. Only strength is important."

"Yes," said the messenger sadly. "Only the strength of the lion and the cunning of the wolf."

"I deprecate," Villefranche said, to show that he, too, though a gentleman, was a scholar, "this growing idea of the nation. So long as there is strength and order, it does not matter whether the unifier is French or Italian."

"No," the Duke's messenger said. "Not yet."

Villefranche looked back at the room behind them. "I will report this," he said. "It is not an incident for war."

"Man's justice was done," the messenger said.

"But not God's?"

The messenger shrugged his narrow sloping shoulders. "How may man, being mortal, know the justice of the Infinite?"

Seated once more in his own study, with his scholar's cloak drawn about him, the Duke's messenger felt a strange peace. Beside him, on his writing table, lay his vellum-bound edition of Livy, and fresh paper and quills. Perhaps there would be a day, the messenger thought, when his name would echo through history as the greatest of all the translators of the Latin historians.

But in the meantime — he shrugged — in the meantime he must waste himself on the dirt and dross of corruption, writing reports which would be read by his cunning bestial master and then forgotten. And the Duke's messenger was growing old and time was eluding him, and he saw himself slipping into the oblivion of servitude, into that silence in which, to the ears of history, he would be not even an echo beside the sound of those resounding syllables, Cesare Borgia.

He took a sheet of foolscap, wet his pen, and began to write. To even these stilted, hateful documents he lent the full weight of all his scholarship, feeling as he did the irony of his position. The facts behind his report no longer had meaning to him. He inscribed them with the dry perspicuity with which his beloved Livy had spoken of the growth of Latium.

He wrote: "To my beloved and worshipped lord and master, Cesare Borgia, Duke Valentin, Lion of Italy, Strong Sword of Christ. Greetings.

"Knowing full well the discrepancy which exists between the public and the private act, I beg leave of these few words to give to you a thought or two which my public report omitted. You may perhaps remember that in that report I expressed what I am sure is your own admiration for the effective way in which that wolf of the North, that scourge of the mountains, Montagno, Count of Castello Montagno, avenged the theft of your precious gift to the majesty of France.

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"And yet, that pedantry of mine, of which you have often spoken with such winning humor, that pedantry, I say, forces me to add to this picture.

"I traveled to Castello Montagno with but one thought in mind. The theft of the emeralds must, under no circumstances, be used by the French as the moral excuse for an invasion. Such an excuse, Count Montagno deprived them of. And so, in that sense, my mission was accomplished for me. I had not thought the Count so clever.

"At first, it seemed to me that he was not being clever at all. But then he knew that popinjay of a Villefranche as I did not. He knew that Villefranche would not question the wisdom of placing a deaf-mute on guard duty. He knew that Villefranche would not question Nofrio's ability to distinguish between French and Italian livery in a pitch-black room. And those were his only risks. He made one mistake, it is true, but, fortunately, it passed Villefranche unnoticed. And the conception of the sketches was a master stroke, worthy of so redoubtable a strategist.

"And yet, not once, but twice was Montagno given away — once through his folly, and once through that instability of the human spirit which all great princes would be well advised to take within their thought. But of this Villefranche knew nothing.

"If you would care, after reading this report, to do me the honor of rereading my public report, you will notice that what so impressed poor Villefranche was the terrible scream of the deaf-mute. Truly and unmistakably, it was the scream of a man possessing no normal powers of speech. Yet so tender were Villefranche's nerves that he did not notice, as I did, the mutilated stump of Nofrio's tongue. A torn, jagged stump of a tongue in the mouth of a man born a deaf-mute? Perhaps, but much more likely we saw in Nofrio a man whose tongue had been plucked out late in life. And were that so, it was at least possible that Nofrio, if he could not speak, could hear and understand.

"I must confess that I had expected something of the kind, and yet, misjudging Montagno's nature, I had feared for something more crude. This was, indeed, polished and jeweled. For all the case hung about one man, a man from whom Montagno had removed the power of speech. Since he was illiterate, he lived, save for his eyes, in a world where communication with his fellows was impossible. He could comprehend, but he could not speak back.

"But no, we have a method, Montagno told us; the matter of the sketches, and had it not been for Montagno's mistake, I would have to this moment merely suspected without knowing. Yet now that I know, it seems the act of a child, wilful and clever, and because it was so I can recognize it as the work of a man with great powers of mind. If you will turn once again to your public report (and

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here I must again thank you for the great honor which you have done me in affixing *your* august signature to it), you will observe carefully the manner in which the test was made.

"The Count had instructed us that Nofrio had been informed of the nature of the test and, hence, naturally, we had no desire to have the terms recapitulated when Nofrio was brought before us; and the Count did not do so. But mark — neither did he, at any time when Nofrio was in the room, so much as mention the sketches. True, as a deaf-mute, it would have availed Nofrio nothing, but you and I now have reason to suspect that Nofrio was not deaf.

"Now mark further: When the first picture was brought forth, what did the Count say. Did he say, 'Mark well this picture, wretched Nofrio.'? No, he said merely, that if Nofrio's comrades-in-arms had taken the emeralds, they would be executed. And hearing those words, naturally Nofrio shook his head, for he knew his comrades were guiltless.

"And when the second picture was shown, again Corsini did not mention it. Merely he said, that if the French had taken the jewels there would be war. And again, Nofrio, the unfortunate, shook his head.

"But observe: when the third picture, which was to be his confession of guilt, was produced, Nofrio heard these strange words from the Count: 'Nofrio will be free,' and eagerly, incredulously, the fool nodded yes, and in nodding, sealed his fate.

"But Nofrio had not taken the jewels. The jewels were, as you may have surmised, taken by the wolf of the north, Montagno of Castello Montagno. Presumably, sometime during the day, he walked past the outer guards, killed Nofrio's comrade, and wounded the already-muted Nofrio. We shall undoubtedly soon hear of those jewels appearing on the markets of England and the Germanies.

"How else, indeed and indeed, account for the Count's elaborate ruse? Now were you not as clever as you are, you might by now be asking, 'Why did Nofrio nod when he saw the third picture?' But such a question were madness coming from the lips of the tiger of the plains. You have realized, of course, the purpose of the maimed tongue, the purpose of the test, the purpose of the careful phrases. The lamentable fact is that *Nofrio never did admit his guilt.* Nofrio never saw the pictures. *Nofrio was blind.*

"I suspected this when I saw his vacant, staring eyes. I was almost sure when I saw that Fra Dominico placed the pictures before his eyes, rather than letting him turn his eyes toward them. And I was certain, indeed and indeed, when the Count made that pointless, rash mistake: *when he held the torch a mere foot from those unflinching, unknowing eyes.*

"I like to think that Nofrio was blind from birth, and that the Count's only cruelty had been a certain degree of cruelty, in which, of course, we all indulge, and then the matter of the

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tongue. And, indeed, how much more blind was Villefranche, for the truth was before him and before his sighted eyes, and he saw it not.

"I did not speak, not even to Montagno when I left, of the matter, for he had served his purpose, and Nofrio his, and France was deceived. It would have been amusing to have observed his stunned discovery that someone knew his secret, but it would have been unprofitable, and one of the rules of statescraft is that one does not do the unprofitable. And after, he would have swelled only the more that another had observed his cleverness.

"But more important, he has unwittingly delivered into our hands the proof of his potential perfidy, and of his financial insecurity, and of his desire to risk even the wrath of France in order to arm his barren, poverty-stricken lands without our knowledge. Perhaps, indeed, he even contemplates using his new arms and men against your own person and power, but we are now forearmed. His cleverness has delivered him into our hands, and we may use him merely so long as we wish.

"It was, in truth, one of those affairs where all profited, a situation so unique as to merit your study: for the Marquis had his explanation, and the Count had his emeralds, and your Grace has now this knowledge which is so much more valuable than jewels. Only poor Nofrio suffered, and we must, indeed, take comfort in the thought that not even a sparrow may fall to the ground without Someone taking cognizance of his death.

"As always, your Grace, I throw myself prostrate at your feet, worshipping your wisdom and your strength.

Your servant,

Niccolo Mächiavelli"

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THE ADVENTURES OF KARMESIN

by GERALD KERSH

6. KARMESIN, CON MAN

KARMESIN was looking at himself in the mirror. The mirror measured some few square inches. Karmesin's surface measurements must have run to an almost astronomical number of square feet: he had to take four looks to see the whole of his face. He passed a hand over his cropped white head, which gave out a noise such as you might make by rubbing together two pieces of sandpaper; scowled at himself with his ponderous eyebrows; and then, with a deft gesture, divided into two parts his gigantic Nietzschean mustache and gave the ends a twirl; slapped himself in the chest, tried to look at the back of his neck, dragged down his cuffs, polished his shoes on the backs of his trouser-legs and, in general, indulged in such an orgy of titivation that I could not help asking:

"Are you going to meet a woman, or something?"

"No. My day is finished. Observe my hair, how white it is. Also this mustache. There was a time when no woman could resist this mustache; a certain duchess used to tie little pieces of ribbon to the ends of it. But it is all vanity."

"Bits of ribbon!" I said.

Karmesin swung round his big, plum-like eyes, and glared at me. "The trouble with you, my fine fellow," he said, "is that you are a skeptic. You believe nothing that you do not see. Therefore you are a fool. 'Seeing is believing!' *Pfui*, I say; and again, *Pfui!* It is thirty years since I last saw my own knees. So am I therefore to refuse to believe in them? There is no fool quite so foolish as the skeptic, the Wise Guy. *I* know. I know all about fools. So listen to what I say. The greatest blockhead on earth is the clever man who thinks himself cleverer. Hence, I could extract a hundred thousand francs from a man of whom it was said: 'The banknotes trickle through his fingers like flypapers.' "

"Who was that?"

"A man called Medved, a crook."

"How did you swindle him?"

Karmesin chuckled. "Listen," he said.

"You might have thought," said Karmesin, "that the man was not born who could swindle Medved. There was no underhanded trick that he had not thought of first. He was more slippery than a basinful of eels, and subtle with a fantastic subtlety — almost as subtle as myself. There was no dirty business with which he had not soiled his hands. He had dipped his fingers in a thousand different pockets. He was clever, and he knew it. First teach a skunk how to make a smell, then

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teach Medved a new trick! Ha, it was for Karmesin to do that; yes, *chort vozmi*, me, Karmesin, by heaven!

"He was one of those men who can both get money and keep it. He must have been a millionaire. He kept accounts. He introduced a post-office atmosphere into his shady dealings. Not a stamp, not a pen-nib escaped him, and he would stay up half the night to figure out what happened to a mislaid farthing. You cannot conceive the caution and the meanness of that man! He would have made a Syrian pawnbroker appear like Diamond Jim Brady. But he had brains, and also nerve. At the same time, he was as smooth as glycerine. He looked like an octopus — he had a dirtyish pallor, no shape, evil eyes, and a beak. In shaking hands with him you felt that six or seven other hands were investigating your pockets while a dozen eyes watched you. He was feared. He made money out of everything. But he was still unknown to the police.

"I met him in Paris. I was very prosperous at this time. You could have seen me in an overcoat with a sable collar and a stud worth a thousand pounds looking like a magnate. And it entered my mind that it would be an achievement to separate this Medved from a few of his carefully hidden thousands. I took him to Olsen's Bar, gave him champagne, and let him see that my wallet was packed with beautiful new five-hundred-franc notes. I could feel his wicked eyes crawling all over me.

"After a while he said: 'You are doing well.' I replied: 'Very well.' 'And might one ask which branch of business you have decorated with your unquestionable talents, Monsieur Schall?' I smiled, and said quite openly: 'Undoubtedly, my dear Monsieur Medved, I shall be very happy to tell you. I have a mint.' He laughed. I took out my wallet, showed him its contents, and selected a five-hundred-franc note, which I threw across the table to him. 'What do you think of that note?' I asked.

"He was not the man to be deceived by a forgery. He handled the note, held it to the light, and said: 'I think it's very nice. In fact, genuine. It *is* genuine.' I smiled, and said: 'And what would you say if I told you that it was not?' 'Why, then,' he replied, 'I should say that you have found a genius of an engraver, a master of printing, and the greatest paper-maker in the world.' I said: 'You would be wrong. I have found no such things. One genius, yes. But that is neither here nor there. You must excuse me. I have to go.'

" 'Wait,' he said. 'This note: it is certainly genuine.' I replied: 'Keep it as a souvenir. It is not genuine. Take it into any bank. Tell the cashier: I have every reason to suspect that this note is a forgery. Have it scrutinized. And still they will pronounce it genuine! And still the fact remains that it was made in a hotel bedroom in Vienna, with an apparatus not much larger than a typewriter.'

"His heart must have turned over

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at this, but he simply blinked, and said: 'We might do business together.' 'Forgive me,' I said, 'but there is no business that I have to discuss with you.' I gave him my card, and left him.

"As I expected, he followed me. He telephoned every day. Once or twice, I took him to dinner, always paying the bill with a new five-hundred-franc note. I let a month pass, six weeks. We talked of everything — except the apparatus not much larger than a typewriter, although his tongue was itching to discuss it. Once I showed him a German hundred-mark note; on another occasion, a new American hundred-dollar bill. To cut it short — in the end, he begged me to tell him about it, and I did.

"The process, as I explained it to him, was simple. I did not involve myself in the innumerable technical complexities of banknote manufacture. No. I had, I told him, a method of *transferring the imprint* of a note on to a blank sheet of paper. Hence, I could interleave blank paper and real banknotes and, within twelve hours, double the number of the notes.

"He asked: 'And the apparatus?'

"I told him: 'A sort of metal bath, combined with a heater and press. It is exceedingly simple.'

" 'May I see it, Monsieur Schall?' 'No, you may not, Monsieur Medved.' 'Did you invent it, Monsieur Schall?' 'No, not entirely. The combination of chemicals essential to the process was invented by an Austrian chemist who works in a dye factory. I helped to elaborate the press. The greatest difficulty is the paper, but I am able to obtain that.' 'And is it a costly process?' he asked. I told him: 'There is a certain cost. It would cost one about five shillings to duplicate five thousand notes of five-hundred francs each.'

"He thought for a while, and said: 'I should like to see such a machine working.' I laughed, and said: 'I find your company very pleasant, my dear Medved, but I have not yet the honor and pleasure of knowing you well enough for that!' He hastened to assure me. 'My motive is not merely curiosity, Monsieur Schall. If this machine works, I would be prepared to make an offer.' 'No doubt, Monsieur Medved, but I should not be keen to sell.'

"So it went on, for two weeks more. At length, I agreed to give him a demonstration on the understanding that, if he was satisfied, he would buy the press and the formula for two hundred and fifty thousand francs."

Karmesin laughed. I said: "But Karmesin, you're not going to tell me that you really *could* turn one note into two?"

"Aren't I? You'll see, my friend. I arranged to show Medved what my machine could do. I told him: 'Have ready at your flat one thousand new notes of a hundred German marks.' He protested: 'Why German marks?' 'Because the only paper I have is German bank paper, and of that, at present, I have no more than twelve hundred sheets. I'll show you whether

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this machine works or not! In eight hours, I shall turn one hundred thousand marks into two hundred thousand; in your presence; and before your very eyes.' He said: 'Very well. Be at my flat at mid-day tomorrow, with your machine, and everything else necessary.'

"Good. Next day, I took my machine and went to Medved's flat — a grim and filthy place, over a grocer's shop off the Boulevard Rochechouart. I went upstairs. Medved was there with another fellow, a sort of ape, with a broken face and tremendous shoulders, whose right hand was perpetually in his coat pocket. 'Just in case,' said Medved, very sweetly. 'Not that I distrust you. God forbid. Only nothing could be easier than to knock me down and walk out with my hundred thousand marks.' I said to him: 'Medved, if I wanted to rob you, the last thing I should stoop to would be robbery with violence. I would swindle you if I could, yes. But knock you down? *Pfui!*' He said: 'Let me see the machine.'

"I took it out of its case. It looked like a common black tin box. I opened it and showed Medved the inside. 'Look well,' I said, 'it is very simple. This is a sort of tank of thick glass. This top plate is simply a press, to hold the contents down firmly. Here, as you see, is a spirit-lamp, which heats the surrounding water-jacket. The entire secret of the process is in the compound which transfers the imprint of the real note to the blank paper, and with which we thoroughly moisten every note and every blank sheet before putting them into the press. I will show you, now . . .'

"I picked up the bundle of bank-notes, and examined them, one by one. Medved's ape-man watched me so closely that his breath tickled my neck. Medved also, was all eyes. They thought that I might perform some trick of legerdemain, and palm a few notes. Fools! Fools, to rest so confident in their own knowledge of low crime!

"I damped every note and every sheet of paper, and built up a neat pile composed of alternate bank-notes and blanks. The smell of the secret compound was preposterous — it conveyed memories of ancient battle-fields in hot sunlight, questionable eggs, and the odor of the fish that goes into the Cate Nouilles in wooden boxes, which makes even strong fish-porters unwell — and mingling with it came the ape-man's breath, charged with garlic and Brie cheese and twist-gut brandy. It was not by any means a garden of roses. Still, I built up my tower of beautiful new notes and nice clean paper, and then wrapped it in strong vellum, which I carefully sealed.

" 'Watch,' I said, 'I now place the parcel in the press. I tighten the clips . . . one, two, three, four. Good. Now I light this spirit-lamp, and very firmly close the lid. Now we wait.'

" 'How long?' 'Four hours. The temperature must be kept at about eighty-eight centigrade. After that it must be allowed to cool slowly for an-

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other four hours. Then we open the parcel, and your money is doubled.'

"Medved paced the room. 'It seems too good to be true,' he said, 'but if the worst comes to the worst, I shall have lost only eight or nine hours of my time. Pedro, stand guard over that machine!' Pedro took from his bulging pocket an indescribably sinister revolver. Then we waited.

"Two hours passed. I fussed with the thermometer. Three hours passed. The atmosphere was tense. Four hours. 'Ten more seconds,' I said, looking at my watch. 'One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . five . . . six seven . . . eight . . . nine . . . *ten* — open up!' and I tore off the lid and pulled out the bundle, steaming and hot. 'Blankets!' I shouted, 'Blankets!' Medved tore three thick blankets off his bed, and we wrapped the parcel in them and put it in front of the fire.

" 'Pedro, guard that parcel!' Pedro squatted over the parcel like a cannibal guarding a victim. Another hour passed. 'Is all this waiting essential?' 'Yes it is. Let that bundle cool too quickly, and you'll get only half an impression, and the money will be spoiled too. Besides, the paper must also dry slowly. You must have patience.'

"Footsteps sounded in the passage. Pedro rose and cocked his revolver. Medved went over to his bundle of money and prepared to defend it with his life. The footsteps passed. We all sighed with relief. I locked up my little machine and put it back in its case, together with all the little bottles. 'Still another half-hour to go.'

"And at that very moment there was a thunderous knocking at the door — heavy truncheons; we all recognized the sound — and an unmistakable voice roared 'Open that door! In the name of the law!' I had hysterics. 'The money!' I said to Medved, in a terrible whisper. 'Hold it! Guard it! Don't open it! It will all be spoiled!' He clutched it to his bosom. Then I said: 'My God, the machine!'

" 'Open that door or we break it down!' shouted the police. I seized the machine, and rushed out by the fire-escape. 'Guard the money with your life!' I shouted. Just then, the panels of the door began to crack. . . ."

"Well?" I asked.

"Well! What do you think? When Medved opened his parcel, he found two thousand neat pieces of newspaper. I found a hundred thousand marks — very damp and malodorous, it is true, but very acceptable. It was the oldest trick in the world — switching similar parcels. Bah, fools!"

"But the police?"

"Police? They were three men whom I had employed to come in at that precise moment. But Medved did not realize that until he opened the parcel. Then he saw that he, Medved, the fox, had been taken in by an ancient swindle and a common Chinese-puzzle cabinet. He could do nothing, not even complain to the police. But it shows you how, by means of an atmosphere, you can get even blood out of a stone. It all goes to show the folly of human vanity."

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Barry Pain's most important contribution to the detective-crime field is probably THE MEMOIRS OF CONSTANTINE DIX *(1905), which has been compared by some critics with E. W. Hornung's tales of Raffles. The Constantine Dix book, however, is virtually unknown to American readers. Perhaps the only stories the American aficionado connects with the name of Barry Pain are a group of four shorts known as "Detection Without Crime," included in the volume titled* ONE KIND AND ANOTHER *(1914). The four tales are "from the note-book of the late Horace Fish," whose hobby was the solution of those mysteries which are to be found in everyday life. E. M. Wrong selected two of the Horace Fish adventures for his* CRIME AND DETECTION *(1926), and since the Wrong anthology has always been as popular as the Wright anthology which appeared in the following year, Barry Pain achieved a small measure of fame among the cognoscenti.*

Comparatively, the least known of Barry Pain's humorous flirtings with crime is a volume of short stories called THE PROBLEM CLUB *(1919). This series of tales is distinctly novel in approach, and although thirty years old shows no glaring signs of wear; the original freshness still peeps through. We bring you "The Giraffe Problem" which might be termed, to paraphrase the author himself, "Puzzle Without Detection Without Crime."*

The author himself? He was a full-bearded, full-mustachioed man whose avocational interests reveal a great deal: Barry Pain devoted his spare time to drawing, Georgian literature, occultism, and precious stones. There is more than a hint of old-fashioned richness in that queer quartet.

THE PROBLEM CLUB

by BARRY PAIN

THE general public knows little about the Problem Club. Many are not even aware that it has now been in existence for several years. Nor can it be said that the references to it which have appeared from time to time in the Press have been very enlightening, or even reasonably accurate.

For instance, a paragraph in a recent issue of a society paper (which, it may be admitted, is generally well informed) makes various statements as to the Problem Club. It says that the club has its premises underground in Piccadilly, that a former Premier is a member of it, that all the members are required to swear a most solemn oath to act with scrupulous honor in the monthly competitions, and that high play frequently goes on. The actual truth is that there are no

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club premises. The famous but old-fashioned restaurant that reserves two rooms on the first floor for the club's monthly meetings is not situated in Piccadilly. No Premier has ever been a member. The story of the solemn oath is even more absurd. After all, the members are gentlemen. They would as soon think of taking a solemn oath not to cheat at cards or at golf. The "scrupulous honor" is taken for granted. Lastly, there is no high play in the accepted sense of the term. The amount that a member can win or lose in the monthly competitions will be stated presently, and any betting on the results is prohibited.

Silly misrepresentations of this kind have caused some annoyance, and it is now thought that a discreet but authorized account of some part of the proceedings of the club would be preferable.

The Problem Club consists of twelve members, and the annual subscription is one hundred and thirty-four pounds. Of this sum twenty-four pounds is allotted to the club expenses, including the club dinners which are held on the first Saturday in every month. Each member in turn acts as chairman at one dinner in the year, afterwards adjudicating upon the problem competition for that month; while at the other eleven meetings he is himself a competitor, the remaining one-hundred and ten pounds of his subscription being treated as eleven entrance fees of ten pounds each.

The problems are not of a mathematical nature, and were for some time invented and propounded by Leonard, the ingenious head-waiter of the restaurant. The winner receives the whole of the entrance fees, amounting to one hundred and ten pounds; if there is more than one winner this amount is divided equally between them. Thus for his investment of one hundred and ten pounds it is possible that a member may in one year obtain a return of one thousand two hundred and ten pounds, if he is the sole winner of the eleven competitions for which he is eligible. But the minute-books of the club show that in actual practice this has never happened; indeed, the record, made by Mr. Pusely-Smythe in 1911, is seven wins, and on two occasions out of the seven he had to share the prize with another successful competitor.

It may be admitted that the club has necessarily been of the nature of a secret society. Some of the problems set have been rather curious, and it has occasionally happened that in the course of their practical solution members have been led to do things which might prejudice them in their domestic or social relations, or even subject them to the penalties of the law.

It is permitted to add an account of some of the pre-war meetings of the club, various natural precautions being taken to prevent the discovery of the identity of members. . . .

It was the forty-third meeting of the Problem Club. Dinner was over,

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and the members had adjourned to the lofty and comfortable room where the business of the evening was transacted. A side-table was suitably equipped with provision for smokers — all the members were smokers — and for such other refreshments as might be required in the course of the evening. One or two waiters still lingered — removing a coffee cup, handing a liqueur, or placing an ash-tray and matches conveniently on one of the small tables. A hum of conversation went on through the blue haze of the cigar smoke. Mr. Pusely-Smythe, with his usual lugubrious manner, was just coming to the end of a screamingly funny story. Any reference to the competition to be settled is by an unwritten law forbidden until the chairman has opened the proceedings, but it was noticeable that Major Byles was once more talking of resigning his membership. He was not taken very seriously. He was an original member and though he lived in the country for the greater part of the year, had never been known to miss a single meeting of the club. His continuous bad luck in the competitions had irritated him, but nobody believed in his threat of resignation, and it may be doubted if he quite believed in it himself.

The waiters left the room, and Sir Charles Bunford, an elderly gentleman of distinguished appearance, who was chairman for the evening, took his place at his table and arranged his papers. Among them the club check-book showed temptingly. In accordance with the club custom by which the chairman at one meeting acted as secretary at the next, Dr. Alden took his seat beside Sir Charles and prepared to make a note of the proceedings for the club minute-book. Conversation ceased. The other members seated themselves informally in a semicircle of easy-chairs. There was, indeed, a marked absence of formality at the Problem Club. There was no order of precedence. The chairman did not rise when he spoke, nor did members rise when they answered him.

"Now, gentlemen," Sir Charles began, "we have before us tonight the Giraffe Problem. I will read it out to you as worded by our esteemed friend Leonard: 'It is required to induce a woman who is unaware of your intention to say to you, "You ought to have been a giraffe." ' Now, of course, I'm not a competitor, but I must say that I'm sorry I'm not. Upon my word, I don't think Leonard has ever given us anything quite so easy."

There were several dissentient voices: "Not a bit of it."

"Can't agree with you there, Bunford."

"Wish I'd found it so."

"Leonard knew what he was doing this time."

"Oh, very well," said Sir Charles smiling. "I should have thought there were a score of conversational openings to which the inevitable reply would be, 'You ought to have been a giraffe.' I may be wrong, but I still expect that the prize tonight will

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have to be divided among four or five of you. However, we'll see what luck you've had. I'll begin with you, doctor, and then go on in the direction of the sun and the wine."

Dr. Alden shook his head. He had a strong head, an alert expression, and a bright eye. "No good," he said. "There was too much to do in Harley Street this month for me to be able to give the proper time to it. I made an attempt. It has probably cost me the esteem of an excellent woman; these excellent women never think you're serious except when you're joking. I gave her the chance to tell me I ought to have been a giraffe, but she never took it. Enough said. Try the next man."

"The next is our only member of Parliament, Mr. Harding Pope."

"Not competing this month," said Mr. Pope rather pompously. "My constituency has made great demands upon me, and I'm unable to defend my entrance fee. Fortunately, the pleasure of the company in which I find myself is worth far more."

"That's all right," said Sir Charles warningly, "but don't get too slack. We've got a long waiting list. What about you, Major Byles?"

"My usual luck," said the Major. "I worked the whole thing out completely and made all the necessary preparations. I was down at my cottage at the time. I assure you that during the whole of breakfast one morning I talked about practically nothing except giraffes and the way that they can pull down fruit from a tree, thanks to their thundering long necks. My wife, the children's governess, and Mrs. Hebor, who was stopping with us, all heard me, though I can't say that they seemed particularly interested. Afterwards, my wife and I were in the garden, and I pointed to a tree full of ripe cherries.

" 'I like fruit,' I said, 'but I hate climbing trees.'

"Now, considering the ground-bait that I had been putting down at breakfast, I consider the betting was ten to one that she would reply that I ought to have been a giraffe. Instead of that, she said that Wilkins would get them for me, and then seemed surprised that I was annoyed. A few minutes later I tried the governess with precisely the same remark, and she asked me if I would like to have a ladder fetched. (I often wonder what I pay that woman her salary for.) Then Mrs. Hebor came out — as dependable a woman as I know in a general way; you nearly always know what she is going to say before she says it — and I told her that I liked cherries, but hated climbing to get them.

" 'You ought,' she began — and this time I thought I really had got it — 'to be able to reach some of those without climbing.'

"After that I gave up. No amount of intelligence can contend against luck like that. Matter of fact, I'm tempted to give up this problem business altogether."

"Oh, don't do that," said Sir Charles soothingly. "It was hard

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lines, but we shall see you a prize-winner one of these days. Now, Mr. Cunliffe, what have you to tell us?"

"I failed," said the Rev. Septimus Cunliffe, an elderly cleric who specialized in broad-mindedness. "Plausible strategy, but disappointing results. Nothing of interest to report."

"Did you do any better, Mr. Matthews?"

Mr. Matthews was a man of forty; bald, round-faced, rubicund, and slightly obese. The task of ordering the club dinners and the wines to be drunk therewith was always left in his hands with a confidence which was invariably justified. His knowledge as an epicure was considerable, and it is possible that his intelligence was less considerable, but more than once he had been lucky in a competition. He was the richest man in a club where nobody was very poor, and was good-tempered and popular.

"Well, you know," said Matthews, "I feel as if I ought to have won this. At one time it looked as if I simply had it chucked at me. I was talking to Lady Amelia, who does a lot in the East End and is always nosing round for subscriptions.

" 'Why do you men drink?' she asked in her blunt way.

"The question of this competition occurred to me, and it looked like a good chance.

" 'Well,' I said, 'the pleasure begins in the palate, but I fancy that it continues in the throat. I often wish I had a longer throat.'

"You would have hardly thought she could have missed it, but she did. Said that she was sure I was not so bad as I made myself out to be, and milked me of a fiver for some 'good cause.' "

"Your turn next, Jimmy," said Sir Charles.

The Hon. James Feldane, a rather weary young man, said, "Well, I claim to be a winner, but there's a shade of doubt about it, and I'll ask for your ruling. All I can say is that if I don't touch the money my luck's even worse than the Major's. Like him, I was systematic about it. My first step was to buy some of the highest collars that could be got for money — two inches or so too high for me and beastly uncomfortable. I put one of them on, and looked like a bad freak — something out of a back number of *Punch*. My next step was to call on my married sister. She told me to go home and dress myself properly, as I knew she would. So I asked in my innocent way what was wrong.

" 'Alluding to my collar?' I said. 'Well, I like plenty. I'd wear a collar three feet high if I could.'

"And then my fool of a brother-in-law stuck his oar in and said, 'You ought to have been a giraffe'; and I'm absolutely certain Dora would have said it if he hadn't got in first.

"So there it is — the words were all right, but they were used by a man. Still, for some purposes — bankruptcy and things of that kind — a man and his wife count as one, don't they?"

"My ruling," said Sir Charles, "is that your claim fails. It is required

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that the words should be used by a woman, and your brother-in-law is not a woman."

"Yes, I was afraid you'd think so," said Jimmy, "but it was worth trying."

"Now, Mr. Pusely-Smythe," said the chairman.

"I claim to have won," he said in a melancholy voice. "My method was not the most obvious or direct, and might easily have failed, but luck was with me. I must tell you that I happen to know a Mrs. Magsworth, who of late years has given way a good deal to Nature Study. She haunts the Zoo and the Botanical Gardens. She understands about the habitat of the hyena, and if cockroaches devour their young, and which end of the tree the onion grows — all that kind of thing. She is rather severe with people who, as she phrases it, 'show an abysmal ignorance of the simplest facts.' She has a face like a horse, though that is not germane to the question. I arranged with a kindly hostess to let me take Mrs. Magsworth in to dinner one evening.

"I said: 'I'm so glad to meet you again, Mrs. Magsworth. With your knowledge you will be able to settle a point that has been worrying me for days. My little nephew asked me which was the tallest animal. And, do you know, I couldn't be quite sure.'

"'Then, Mr. Smythe,' she said, 'you ought to have been. A giraffe is much the tallest of the mammals.'

"So I claim to have won. She, being a woman ignorant of my intention, was induced to say to me the words required — *in the order required* — and without the interpolation of any other word."

"But there's the interpolation of a full stop," said Mr. Harding Pope, and was at once called to order.

Sir Charles took a few moments to consider his decision, and then said:

"My ruling is that Mr. Pusely-Smythe's claim is conditionally allowed. It is true that Mrs. Magsworth used other words both before and after the words required, but that is not precluded by the terms of the problem. The only other possible objection is that there was the interpolation of a full stop. Now, there is no full stop in spoken speech: it is represented by a pause. In this case the pause indicated the end of a sentence. In another case the pause might have indicated that the woman could not for a moment think of the word giraffe. In that case I am sure that no objection would have been raised. Yet there, too, a sign could be used to represent it in print or writing. Leonard required certain words in a certain order, but he did not forbid a pause to be made between them. Unless some member has induced a woman to use the same words with no pause whatever, Mr. Pusely-Smythe's claim is allowed."

As no other member had met with any success at all, a check for one hundred and ten pounds was drawn to the order of Mr. Pusely-Smythe and handed to him with the congratulations of the chairman.

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"Killer's Keeper" has two points of plot worth more than passing comment. One of them was strong enough to persuade Warner Brothers to buy the short story and adapt the plot point for a movie. Not many short stories — especially detective-crime short stories which first appeared in a pulp magazine — are purchased by major moving-picture studios; and of the very few that are bought, even fewer become Class-A, million-dollar-budget pictures. Yet, that is precisely what happened to "Killer's Keeper." It became the basis of "Conflict," starring Humphrey Bogart. What was the plot point that Warner Brothers developed into a movie? Read the story first, and we'll tell you when you've finished; and we'll also give you the pedigree of the other plot point in David X. Manners's tale of a modern Cain.

KILLER'S KEEPER

by DAVID X. MANNERS

IF A club or a gun was within reach, I guess I'd have killed him right then and there. He'd come up the walk and was standing idly by the door as I went out. The complete frustration and boiling rage I felt were plain on my face. He grinned kind of awkwardly.

"I'm sorry, Jes," he said. "But it looks like I beat your time. I hope you ain't too sore, and that we can still be friends."

It was a wonder I didn't smash him one in the face. My right fist was balled at my side and I was pressing so tight on the tiny little trinket I held in it that it just about drew blood. That trinket was a ring — an engagement ring. I'd sent all the way to New York for it, only to find out when I got it that the girl was going to marry someone else. She'd just told me so. She'd been nice about it. Dolores was always nice about anything she did. But I'd never forget that the boob she was going to marry instead of me was my own brother.

No, he isn't a boob. I shouldn't say that. When I looked at him standing there, I could see why it wasn't hard for Dolores to choose between us. Ken had everything. I had nothing. He was big, broad-shouldered, with curly, blond hair and with a smile he always had on his lips whether he felt that way or not. Me, I'm dark. I'm not bad-looking either, but I've got hair that has a funny way of hanging in a lick down over my forehead and a left arm that's known better days. I got that arm crippled fighting a wolf pack up in the hills where Ken and I were sharing sheep range. Ken got by without a scratch. It was always like him to get the breaks.

I looked at him now and grumbled

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something under my breath. I brushed past him and walked down to my truck which was pulled up at the curb in front of the house. It was an old truck, battered and junky. It had been second-hand in the first place. Behind it was Ken's car. It wasn't a truck. Ken didn't have to use a truck when he came calling on his girl. He had a nifty new roadster, with a red-welted top and white-walled tires. Pretty good for a fellow who herds sheep.

I stood there, looking at the car and wondering what I was going to do next when Ignacio, an old Mexican wood-chopper I play dominoes with sometimes in town, saw me and came up.

"Look, Jes," he said in that whining voice of his. "How about that five bucks you owe me? When you gonna pay up? It's been a week."

I was too annoyed to be bothered with him. I dug down in my denim jeans and handed him a quarter.

"Here's two bits," I said. "Let me alone!"

He looked at the coin I dropped into the flat of his hand. Then, as hard as he could, he slammed it down on the ground at my feet.

"I'm not takin' no cheap quarter!" he swore. "You're payin' what you owe me right here and now or I know the reason why."

I gave him the reason — smack in his teeth. I climbed into the cab of the truck and drove off, not looking back to see how badly I'd hurt him. You had to treat gents like him that way, or they'd step all over you.

I drove out of town and up into the hills toward the valley ranch where I was trying to make a living growing apples for the Eastern fancy box-apple market. It was a hell of a crop of fancy apples I had this year. Maybe I should have sprayed them more, but it looked like the less you did for your orchards the better off you were. What a crop!

The sun had just set behind the Sierra Blanca and the purple New Mexico night was settling down when I passed Ken's place. I saw he'd gathered a flock of four or five hundred sheep in his pens, ready for shipping. I couldn't help but think about Dolores again. Those clear, blue eyes of hers. Those soft lips. That figure with the pinched-in waist that looked small enough to squeeze between your thumb and long finger. Blast Ken!

I turned off the road into his place. The sky was streaked with the red and orange streamers of sunset. Where the sun had dropped, it looked a little bloody. Maybe that was what gave me my idea. I went in and started monkeying with the catch on the gate. If I let those sheep out and started them on the run, it was a half-mile to the cliffs. Those woolies would go over without any trouble, and they'd make a pretty sight when they piled up a thousand feet below. Maybe Dolores would change her mind about Ken if he had a couple thousand bucks less. It would even our luck.

A dry spell doesn't hit a sheeper like it does a fruit farmer. Sheep can do without water. They can be fat and full without drinking water for two

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months, just feeding on the juicy verbena and other stuff there's always plenty of. I've seen a lamb, dropped in a dry spell, get to be three months old before it had its first drink. Try running orchards that long without water.

I went in the shed, to come around behind the sheep and drive them out. The hair was hanging down in my eyes, and I was so boiling mad thinking about Dolores that I didn't even bother to push it away.

I don't know yet how Ken got there so fast. He's got a fast car, and I've got a wheezing truck. He probably took the short cut. He saw the gate, where I'd opened it, and the few sheep already drifting out. He guessed in a minute what I was going to do. I knew that. But the fool was going to act like he didn't.

"Hello, Jes," he said, sort of easy like. "You made a mistake, didn't you?"

That was Ken. Always playing the role of the hero. It gave him a big kick to put on this stunt of acting like he didn't read the way things were. He knew damn well! But he was dressed in a clean shirt and fancy duds, and he was wearing a big, silver signet ring with his initial on it that he'd never had before. Dolores had just given him that! She'd made it for him. That was the way Dolores and her granddad made a living — making and selling silver things like that to tourists. Dolores was really in love with Ken. Ken always had the breaks. He always made the money. He didn't have a crippled left arm. He had a big car. He had a swell ranch. He had everything.

I got so mad then that I began to see things clearly for the first time. At least I thought I did. I was a fool to do something like killing a few hundred sheep. There was bigger and better game right here. If Ken were out of the way, it would solve everything. I grabbed a short length of pipe.

Ken was scared. "What are you doing?"

"I'm going to kill you," I said. "That's what I'm going to do. Maybe Dolores will change her mind about where she stands with you out of the way. And this ranch. With you gone, it'll be mine. You don't have a will, but who else will claim it."

I went after him. He backed off, looking for something to grab, but there wasn't anything.

"Don't, Jes," he said. "You're crazy. You'll be marked a killer for life. You can't kill your brother!"

He ducked in and let fly his right fist at me. He was wild, and it caught me in the forehead. I didn't even grunt. Then he snatched up a bucket of red sheep daub. Ken was always a superstitious one. Every sheep he had in his flock had a daub of that paint on its flank to keep away evil spirits. He always had a Mex padre come up to bless them too.

"I'll mark you myself," he said. "With this bloody mark on you everyone will know you killed your own brother."

He let fly the bucket of red paint just as I got him. He broke at the

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knees and slumped down without a sound.

I looked at the bucket of paint and knew I was lucky for once. None of it was on me. If he'd caught me with that paint, I never would have scrubbed it off. Not much of it had even spilled out of the bucket, because there wasn't much in it. I picked up the bucket and put it back on a bench, and rubbed out what little had spilled on my foot.

I drove back what few sheep had got out of the pen and closed the gate again. I had to be careful with them. These were my sheep now. It occurred to me then that this was so simple it was a wonder I had never thought of it before.

I dragged the body into the truck and rode off with it to where I lived. There I saddled myself a horse and put Ken on a pack-saddle. Where Ken was going to now, he'd never return from. Without a body, there would be no murder. Ken would be missed, to be sure, but without ever finding a trace of him, what could they do about it?

They could never say for sure that he'd been killed. I'd tell them I didn't know anything about it if they asked me. It wasn't complicated. It was simple. That was why it would work. And anybody who knows the back places in the New Mexico hill country will tell you there are plenty places where a cached body would never be found.

My head hurt a little where Ken had hit me and I went into the house and looked in a mirror. There wasn't any mark there, but he had hit me a hard blow. Then I went about my business.

I found the most isolated spot anybody could imagine back in the hills and covered the body with rocks. They'd never find him in a million years.

After I got back, I cleaned up and ate and then went down into town again for a couple drinks and a few games of dominoes. Ignacio was there. He sulked.

"I'll get my money," he said. "You'll see."

"You're right you'll get it — when I'm good and ready," I said.

Cruz, the gambler, grinned. "What's the matter, Jes? Your creditors pushing you?"

"It's been a dry year," I said. "No rain. Maybe we'll get some soon."

I went home and went to bed. Now that the thing was beginning to sink in on me a little bit, I was getting shaky. But I knew I was safe. I should have done the thing long ago. I wondered how long it would be before the court gave me possession of his property. I knew there was something about it taking seven years before a missing man was declared legally dead. A long time . . . but worth waiting for.

I didn't sleep so good. I had funny dreams. I dreamed that I hadn't done a good job of killing Ken and that he came back after me. I dreamed that he was walking around in the room and once I could feel his icy hand on

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my forehead. I woke up in the morning with a bad taste in my mouth. I couldn't find my wallet, and I cussed, and I was afraid I'd left it some place.

When I was in town, Balkins, the runty, little guy who runs the grocery, said to me, "Jes, I been looking for your brother Ken. Where is he?"

"How should I know where he is," I said heatedly. "I don't ride herd on him."

Cruz, the gambler, was standing nearby. He said, "Don't get rannicky, you two. I saw Ken at the bank this morning. If you want him, he's probably out at his house now. Why don't you go up there?"

I felt like I would sink through the floor. The sweat that popped out on my forehead and back felt like little needles sticking me. I didn't say anything. I knew Cruz was crazy, or seeing things. Ken was dead when I put him away. Even if he wasn't, those rocks I piled on top of him would be enough to keep him down. Then I remembered that dream about him coming back to get me, and touching me with his hand. I felt funny when I went out into the street.

Ignacio was there, leaning against a post. He grinned up at me with his white teeth. His old, brown eyes were laughing. I didn't say anything and I went home. I should have been out harrowing the late apple orchard, so that if the rains did come, they would do some good. But I didn't feel like it. I couldn't understand what those things had meant back in town. So I just lay around the house that day.

That night, when I was playing games down at the hall, Cruz said to me, "Why you beefin' about always being short of cash? Why don't you do what your brother Ken's doing?"

I guess I turned a little pale. "What do you mean?"

Sid Reeves, the day mechanic at the garage, was at the same table and he said. "Why, ain't you heard? He was in here a little while back tellin' how he was going to have the Santa Fe put in a railroad siding on his place, so he could ship direct. That boy's going places!"

It was crazy. It was impossible. I couldn't meet the looks in the eyes of the men around me because I didn't know how to act. I just couldn't understand it. All I knew was that I had to get out of the place.

I drove by Ken's place, and it was dark. He wasn't there. Then I stopped and tried to get hold of myself. Here I was, acting like he really was alive, when I knew he couldn't be. Or — *could he?* I couldn't get it out of my head how Ken had escaped from the wolves that time by playing possum, while I tried to fight them and got my arm crippled.

I went back to the house and got a horse. There was a pretty good moon and it wasn't hard picking a trail. But I was so mixed up I didn't know where to go myself. I got off wrong a couple of times and then I finally found that side arroyo. The cairn of stones glinted in the faint moonlight that filtered through the dense brush. I got down off my horse and climbed to it. I

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wasn't going to be satisfied until I was sure. I began taking off the stones.

"That ain't necessary," said a voice that sounded like Ken's.

I jerked up with a start, but it wasn't Ken. It was a man holding a long rifle on me. There was a star on his vest and I guessed he must be Sheriff Jones. He'd cat-footed up on me. I blinked at the other men coming up. Cruz, the gambler. Balkins, the grocer. Reeves, the mechanic. A couple others.

Cruz said, "I hated to do this, Jes. But your own brother — God!"

I didn't know what was coming off. My head was whirling and I was all confused. I guess Cruz saw that.

"You see, Jes," Cruz said, "you owed old Ignacio here five bucks. So last night he went to your house to get it. He came back saying that you'd killed your brother Ken. We reckoned we couldn't pin nothing on you without a corpse, so we reckoned if you were guilty, *we could make you lead us to it.* Now we see that Iggie was right — only he called it the mark of Cain. . . ."

My hand went up to brush away the hair that lopped down over my forehead, and I remembered the icy hand that had touched it in my dream.

"Sure, look at it," said the sheriff. "It ain't very plain yet, but it will be in another day or so. It's just like Iggie saw it last night."

The others crowded up. I saw Ignacio grinning at me with his white teeth. He handed me back my wallet. I threw it in his face.

I can still see that mark, while I sit here in my cell waiting for the last day. Like any mark it wouldn't show very clearly until it began turning black and blue. It was where Ken hit me when I was coming after him. He was wearing that silver signet ring Dolores gave him.

K stands for Ken. It stands for Killer too. The mark of Cain. Well, I won't have to be looking at it long.

What Warner Brothers liked about the story you've just read is the psychological trick pulled on Jes. We did not see the motion picture, but as we understand it, a wife is murdered by her husband, who buries the body in a secret spot. The police know that the husband is the murderer, but they have no idea where he hid the body. So they plan and execute a mass-conspiracy: they get people to talk casually and naturally about the dead woman — just as if she were alive. The constant references to his wife — by neighbors, tradesmen, and other townspeople — slowly get under the husband's skin. Finally, he is driven to the fatal step of making sure — and thus reveals the corpus delicti.

No doubt about it: it is an excellent plot point, and we can see how it could be translated into an effective pictorial climax.

The other plot point in the story deserving historical analysis is Mr.

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Manners's variation of the mark of Cain. One version or another of the "tell-tale mark" can be traced back to the earliest crime stories. But did you know that the brilliant George Bernard Shaw not only wrote a detective story, but used the "mark of Cain" theme?

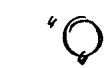
Bernard Shaw wrote his first and only detective story in 1879 — and may we point out, before you gloss over the date, that is a long, long time ago. Indeed, it is eight years before the first appearance in print of the first Sherlock Holmes story.

According to F. E. Loewenstein, who first revealed the facts in a letter to "John O' London's Weekly," issue of November 16, 1945, the Shaw story was titled "The Brand of Cain." Its plot was based on the scientifically accurate fact that a photograph sometimes shows marks on the skin which are invisible to the naked eye: for example, small-pox pustules before the eruptions become visible.

In Bernard Shaw's story a woman has murdered her husband. (After all, how many basic variations are there?) During the struggle the husband has struck his wife in the face with a brand which he had been heating in order to stamp his monogram. The wife manages to obliterate the mark before the police see it, thus saving herself from arrest and conviction. Later, however, she is persuaded by a photographer to sit for a portrait, and in the dark-room the photographer finds an unaccountable mark on the negative. Eventually, the mark is identified as "the brand of Cain."

And although we cannot quote chapter and verse, it is more than likely that the identical plot device was used long before 1879.

Perhaps more interesting than Shaw's first and only detective-story plot is the publishing history of Shaw's first and only detective story. In view of Bernard Shaw's gigantic present-day reputation, it is almost impossible to believe. Shaw submitted the story in 1879 to the six top British magazines of the time, including "The Cornhill," "Blackwood's," and "Chambers's Journal." They all declined with thanks. Four years later, the story still unsold, Mr. Shaw sent the only copy of the manuscript to Hawkes & Phipps, a Birmingham firm of stereotype founders who supplied ready-set columns for the Press. Nothing further was heard, and when Shaw inquired in January 1884, he was informed by Hawkes & Phipps that they knew nothing of such a manuscript. And to this day no trace of the manuscript has been found.



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One of the most popular series of detective stories to appear in EQMM is the saga of the Department of Dead Ends — that fascinating Department at Scotland Yard whose purpose is to catch the law-breaker not by a keen duel of wits, but — well, any way, or just anyhow. It is possible to contend, as the author himself has admitted, that the successes of the Department of Dead Ends are nothing but a long string of flukes, of "lucky breaks." Perhaps, by the rules of detective work, this is so. But if the Department of Dead Ends has no logic, it does have a sort of philosophy — that the law-breaker will walk into prison if you open enough doors for him.

The "tall" tales of the D.D.E. have been of two types: originals written especially for EQMM by the author; and reprints of older stories which, for the most part, were printed only in England. With the publication of "Wit's End" in this issue, we had expected to come to the end of available reprints; but Roy Vickers himself has called our attention to another group of earlier stories.

So, you may look forward to a "new" trilogy about the elephant-memoried Department of Dead Ends — three stories that ring the changes on middle-class murder, all perfectly planned, perfectly executed, yet subject to that unpredictable Fate which neither faultless planning nor faultless execution can guard against. Watch for "The Impromptu Murder," "The Pluperfect Murder," and "The 'Try-Out' Murder" . . .

WIT'S END

by ROY VICKERS

WHEN a man of high intelligence steps outside the law, he pits his cunning against that of the police and the public prosecutor. Like the fox who, we are told, understands the technique of hunting, he runs with discrimination and often gets away.

But the simile breaks down on the Department of Dead Ends — unless you can think of some fussy old gentleman who sets out with the vague intention of following the hounds on foot and accidentally stumbles headlong over the fox.

The Department, one must admit, was not animated by a sporting spirit. Nor did it care anything for psychology or the criminal mentality. This blindness was partly responsible for its success in the Hartways murder. For the murderer had no criminal mentality. The Department of Dead Ends caught him because he was a gentleman. Not a gentleman crook —

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but a gentleman in the rather formidable Edwardian sense of the word, meaning a man of more or less aristocratic lineage who might work but was not compelled to do so, who was eligible for any of the best clubs, and whose manners and morality were strictly within the code of his own class.

Except, of course, for the murder.

Lionel Anstruther Tracington Cornboise was not quite the typical young man of the period. He was intended for the diplomatic service, but while at Oxford was offered a probationary commission in the guards, and accepted. One of his brother subalterns was young Hartways (the man he subsequently murdered), an old school friend, whose first name also happened to be Lionel. But there does not seem to have been any confusion — because at home, at school, and subsequently in the army, and even eventually by his wife, Hartways was always called "Balmy."

Throughout his boyhood Hartways had a slightly eccentric manner and a penchant for practical jokes at which he would laugh inordinately. In the light of subsequent events it may be regretted that the eccentricity was so mild that it rather endeared him to people and earned him the affectionate prefix. For no one guessed the real trouble until it was too late.

As small boys they had joined in energetically despising Hilda Cressnal, the daughter of a retired Indian Colonel who sat for the Borough. They were severally guilty of tweaking her fiery red plaits. As hobbledehoys they had blushed about her. In junior subaltern days she was writing innocent little notes to both of them in the dainty-genteel style of the period. Each of them had a fairly substantial income, and it was understood that they were friendly rivals.

Motor cars were coming into general use, though they were still frowned upon in the mess, because it was commonly believed that they would put an end to hunting. Hartways was the first of the mess to buy one. This gave him the advantage of being able to ignore train services. The indirect result was that when they were all twenty-four years old Hilda accepted him.

Cornboise was best man. If he suffered he did not show it — for at this stage all young officers owed something of their mental make-up to Mr. Kipling. Moreover, this was the heyday of the strong, silent man.

For the next year Lionel Cornboise was an occasional guest at Hartways Manor — "a ring-fence, deer-park" place on the South Downs. Hilda played the game, so Cornboise had no idea that there was anything wrong. In fact, the first suspicion came to him when he and Balmy were in barracks.

Since his marriage Balmy had been rather progressively living up to his nickname. With that nickname he was a licensed wag. But there were limits to the license. There was a practical joke played on the juniors that came under the head of "ragging"

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and got into the papers. There was no court-martial, but the adjutant gave a pretty stiff warning and, in effect, withdrew the license.

For three months Balmy Hartways simmered down. Then, just at the beginning of the London season, he broke out again. On a guest night. The incident was not talked about, and it will be sufficient to say that the Colonel saw him that night and on the next day Balmy Hartways sent in his papers.

Within a week Cornboise was dining with the Hartways at their house in Bruton Street. Balmy Hartways referred openly to the fact that the Colonel had told him what to do — he made a good story out of it.

In those days the ladies withdrew, even if there was only one of them, and left the gentlemen, if not to their port, at least to their brandy liqueurs. Pretty soon Balmy asked Lionel to go up to the drawing-room, saying he would join presently. Afterwards Lionel guessed that Hilda had demanded the arrangement, and it struck him as a little pathetic that Balmy should have agreed.

The scene that follows reads like the rough notes of a play by Mr. Sutro. Measured in years, it is such a short time ago. If Balmy were alive at this moment he would hardly admit that he was elderly. But the key to the social relationships of this period had been trampled in the mud of the Great War, and cannot be found even in the memory of the middle-aged survivors.

"Let me give you some coffee, Lionel. I have no doubt Balmy will join us in a minute."

"Thanks, Hilda. If you will allow me to say it, you are not looking quite your normal self."

At this point, we imagine, Hilda "shrugged her shapely shoulders." As a matter of fact, they really were shapely, as was the rest of her. There is a published photograph headed "A Gibson Girl in Society," and Hilda had the same high coiffure, wide eyes, retrousse nose, prominent chin, narrow waist of the type popularized by Mr. Charles Dana Gibson.

"Oh, it's nothing Lionel! Please don't speak of it." With the words, I am afraid, was a brave little laugh.

"There isn't much a fellow can say." The brave little laugh was making Lionel's voice unsteady. "At your wedding, Hilda, I made a bit of a speech. I felt rather a fool making it. But I happened to mean what I said."

"You said you were Balmy's friend — and my friend, if I would let you be. . . . Oh, Lionel, I want to tell you everything, but I don't know how to begin. . . . Those silly little jokes. He plays them at home — constantly. Not so much here, but at Hartways. It's — awful. He gets moods — and then he's awful, like another person. When he's not playing the jokes he's his old charming self. He's never cruel to me — at least, he never means to be. But away from me he does all sorts of things. He has bought Lord Doucester's yacht. It costs £1000 a year to keep

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it up, and, as you know, we have barely two. I believe — I believe he'll get into debt."

"Good God!" said Lionel, and did nothing. There was, of course, nothing that he could do. But he did not accept their invitation for the yacht that August.

In September rumors about the Hartways reached him. Later he received two extremely cheery invitations from Balmy, but was able to plead duty as an excuse for both. He felt that he dared not face Hilda's tragic eyes, because he knew that the Hartways were "dropping out."

We know at least what he meant by that. Those were the days of "Society," when phrases like "a leading hostess" and "a well-known clubman" had real meaning. This society may have been easier for a rich man to enter than in the Victorian days. But for some lost reason those that were in seem to have attached far more importance to their position than in any previous period of history. If you were in, you spoke of a friend who had dropped out much as nowadays you might speak of a friend who had been sent to Devil's Island. It was as if they regarded the society of non-fashionable doctors, lawyers, business men, and the like — in short, the whole middle-class, cultured or otherwise — as being uncivilized.

Cornboise was worried, too, about their financial position. He knew that the yacht had been offered for sale at a very considerable loss. There was a tale, too, about a very surprising deal at Christie's by which Hartways had bought a diamond necklace and two Old Masters.

In February came another invitation from Balmy, and by the next post a letter from Hilda begging him to accept. He went down the following week, but before he left town he heard that Balmy was doing funny things on horseback. There was, in fact, a sort of horseback series of practical jokes.

He had ridden upstairs in his house — which, after all, did not matter very much. But there was a nasty little incident with the local innkeeper's daughter. Passing her on the road in the middle of the afternoon, he had leaned down, tossed her across the saddle, and galloped into the village, where he had set her down by the inn. He had kissed her once on the cheek as part of the program, but it was not an amorous exploit. It was just a silly practical joke, like the one that had ended his career in the guards. But no one took it as a joke except Balmy. The girl had prosecuted him. The Bench had given him a month, and he was out on bail pending an appeal to Quarter Sessions.

When Cornboise arrived there were half a dozen other male guests — very queer birds. One, called Beeding, was a jockey who had been warned off the turf. They behaved quite decently and were positively deferential to Lionel. But the topics that interested them eluded him. Balmy liked them immensely, and Cornboise wondered what Hilda thought about it.

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He does not seem to have seen Hilda alone. It was a queer visit, with a queer atmosphere in the house, and it is difficult to fill in the gaps and discover how they grouped themselves and passed the time. But it is clear that one night all the men were together, drinking in the gun room about midnight, after Hilda had gone to bed.

Around the walls of the gun room was a well-known series of sporting pictures depicting the first steeplechase, in which men were riding clad in white nightshirts and nightcaps. In one of the pictures was a background of a village and a church with a steeple, which looked faintly like the village and church of Hartways.

Cornboise records that he saw Hartways staring at the picture as if he saw it for the first time — so was almost prepared for the sudden whoop of insane joy.

"I say, you fellows, these fellows were sportsmen, eh, what! How would you like to do a cross-country by moonlight in a nightshirt?"

"Don't wear 'em!" giggled Beeding, the jockey. "It will have to be pajamas for me."

"You can get 'em off the servants," said Balmy. "I'll get mine from Hilda. *Hoicks!*"

Cornboise tried to glare the others out of it, but they were all pretty drunk, and the deference had worn thin, for, at heart, they thought him a dull dog.

Balmy bolted upstairs and the others scattered in quest of white nightshirts or, as a substitute, nightdresses. Cornboise, after some hesitation, followed Balmy. His room was just beyond the Hartways'. Through the door he heard Balmy whooping.

"Well, if you won't tell me where you keep 'em I'm going to have that one. Whoops! By God, Hilda, you must come too! Come like that! As Godiva. We'll make history all over again, and later on we'll have a pageant — please the village, what! Come on! You look fine like that! You needn't mind the boys. They're all the best of fellows."

"Balmy! Balmy — give me my dressing gown."

"Oh, rot, I say, what! You can't have Godiva in a dressing gown. All right, wear it to come down in."

"Yes. Yes. I'll wear it to come down in. It's a fine idea, Balmy! I'll ride Daphne. Go and see that she's saddled for me and I'll join you."

"Good girl! Always said you were a good old sport."

Balmy lurched out of the room, leaving the door open, and when he had gone Cornboise showed himself.

"Why did you say you would go?"

"Oh, I always agree when he's like that. And in a minute or two he forgets. Dr. Treadgold said I must always agree."

"The doctor told you that, did he? . . . What else did the doctor tell you, Hilda?"

("*She was out of breath and her eyes were fixed, almost glazed, and I was very alarmed and thought it better to bully the truth out of her.*" — This

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statement was made at the subsequent trial.)

The truth came tumbling out. Something like this:

"Treadgold said he must have had it all his life. And it's quite incurable and he'll get worse. And Treadgold thinks that when he surrenders to his bail at Quarter Sessions they will have him examined. And Treadgold says he will be certified. And, if not then, it's bound to happen later."

There is a break here, and the next thing we know is that Cornboise confronted the steeplechase party on their return. They were a tough lot, and could have laid him out, but he sent them all to bed except Balmy, whom he pushed into the gun room.

Balmy became nervous and defiant.

"Afraid you're rather bored with the little party, old man! Never mind! There'll be a church parade on Sunday."

"I'm not exactly bored, Balmy. But I shall have to leave tomorrow."

It was a life-long friendship. Balmy remembered this and became morbid.

"If you must go, dear old boy, I'll come with you. We'll go up on the 11:20. I've got to go up anyway and sell that dashed necklace — getting devilish hard up. Mustn't be robbed, for I forgot to insure it. You can be the bodyguard. And I tell you what — I'll take the jolly old starting-handle off the car in case of an attack. Jackie Beeding says it's the safest thing to carry nowadays." He used an imaginary starting-handle in the guise of a bayonet. "Where was I? Oh, yes — I'll give you lunch at the club and we'll talk about old times, what! No, no, I've resigned. Tell you what ——"

"Balmy, you and I are friends." ("*When I said this I put my hands on his shoulders and looked very hard at him. He looked back at me, and I was sure then that he was quite sane while I was speaking to him, and when he answered me his voice was like it used to be.*" — Again I quote from the trial.) "I want to ask you something, old man. Don't you feel that during the last year or so there's been something wrong with you?"

"Yes, I do, Lionel. I don't know what I'm doing, fooling about like this. I must try and pull up."

It was a preposterous setting for a tragedy. For a lucid minute Balmy faced the facts about himself — in the gun room at midnight, flushed and ridiculous, with Hilda's nightdress torn and mud-bespattered over his dinner jacket and riding boots.

Then the soldier acted on the doctor's words in a way that would have horrified the doctor.

"Balmy, old man, you can't pull up — ever. It's like having an incurable disease. If I could have it instead of you I would, but, of course, I can't. I'm thinking of Hilda."

"Then what d'you think I ought to do?"

"You've got a revolver in that drawer, Balmy. Use it like a gentleman."

("*And after I had said that he went silly again and roared with laughter,*

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and I knew he would never do it. So I said I would go by an earlier train, and when I got to my room I admit I cried like a woman, because I had always been very fond of Balmy.")

Hartways Station is built at the mouth of the Starcross tunnel. There is the end of the platform — ten yards to the signal box and another five yards to the tunnel. Cornboise, we must suppose, spent the night thinking about the tunnel. There is no word of the actual preparations he made for the murder.

He left by the 11:03 — a dangerously pointless thing to do, because the 11:03 is a local and peters out at Stortford Mills. If you want to go by the 11:03 from Hartways to Victoria, you have to get out at Stortford Mills and wait on the same platform until the 11:20 comes along. So you might just as well catch the 11:20 to start with and save yourself a wait on Stortford Mills platform.

Cornboise was driven to the station in the car, which then returned for Hartways.

In the pocket in the door was the spare starting-handle — a normal precaution in the days before the self-starter. Cornboise slipped it into his Gladstone.

He boarded the 11:03. When the train entered the tunnel, at a speed that was well under ten miles an hour, he opened the door, stepped onto the footboard, shut the door behind him, and dropped onto the track.

For this operation he needed both hands. His Gladstone bag was looped onto his elbow by means of a cord. He was wearing a raincoat which he had buttoned right up to the throat, and in the pocket of the raincoat was Hartways' revolver.

Now, it is easy enough for an athletic man to board a train going at about ten miles an hour, if he can reach the hand-rail. Cornboise had made a pretty good calculation of the distance and knew that he would miss the hand-rail by about a foot and a half.

That was where the starting-handle came in.

When the 11:20 entered the tunnel, he caught the hand-rail easily enough with the starting handle and swung himself onto the footboards.

He had chosen the second coach, where the first-class compartments would be. He had ascertained that no one else was going up with Hartways, and it was a safe bet that on that line there would be no other occupant of the first-class.

The bet came off. Hartways was alone in a first-class smoker. Cornboise steadied the Gladstone on the footboard, opened the door, and got in.

He shot Hartways through the heart, and almost in the same moment threw him out of the open door into the tunnel. He threw the revolver after him.

From opening the door to throwing the body on the line had taken him about nine seconds. He had shot through Hartways' overcoat. Even so, there was a large splash of blood on

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the seat. He picked up the cushion and reversed it. Then he reversed all the cushions so that the black waterproof side was uppermost. He wiped the starting-handle and left it on the cushions.

With the Gladstone once more on his arm, he crawled along the footboard to the next compartment, a first-class non-smoker.

He was in the compartment the better part of a minute before the train left the tunnel. In the daylight he inspected himself in the mirror. His face was covered with smuts, which he removed with eau-de-cologne from his Gladstone. He unbuttoned the raincoat. His collar was unsoiled. The bottom of the Gladstone bag was caked with grit. He removed it by rubbing it vigorously on the mat.

When the train stopped at Stortford Mills he stood up, put the Gladstone on the rack, and behaved as if he had just got into the carriage.

Before the train started the porter ushered two ladies into the compartment with him, and they traveled together to Victoria. The three of them slipped into a casual conversation concerning the opening of a window. One of the ladies lent Cornboise a paper.

An hour later he had passed through the barrier at Victoria and returned to his rooms in Knightsbridge.

All his leather was kept polished. In the absence of his man he cleaned and polished the Gladstone. He cut the raincoat into small pieces and burned them in the open fireplace.

The evening papers carried the story. He had just finished reading it when a couple of juniors from Scotland Yard called to ask him some more or less pointless questions.

He told them that he must go at once to Mrs. Hartways, who might have need of him, and he talked to them in a four-wheeler to Victoria.

He had, he told them, traveled on the 11:03 to Stortford Mills and there waited for the 11:20. He had taken the earlier train for the express purpose of avoiding his host's company. And, for this reason, at Stortford Mills he had entered a non-smoker. He told them about the nightdress steeplechase. In reply to a question he said he believed Hartways was carrying a valuable necklace, but was not sure.

And then Cornboise had his first shock.

"He was carrying it all right, sir. And we don't need to look far for the motive. It was in his pocket when he left his house. Mrs. Hartways testifies to that. And it was missing when the body was found in the tunnel."

"It's an extraordinary thing, but he was almost expecting to be robbed. He said he intended to carry a starting-handle — as a weapon of defense," said Cornboise, and the juniors wrote it all down.

In the train Cornboise tried to figure out how the necklace could have disappeared. Then he concluded with military simplicity that it was no concern of his. The detectives thanked him for giving them what amounted

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to no information whatever and left him at Victoria.

When he got down to Hartways the jockey party had only just left, having been detained for questioning by the police.

Hilda had "taken to her room," but she received him — in a little dressing-sitting room (the "boudoir"). She was in one of those accordion-pleated tea gowns. She was white and haggard, but to him she was pathetically beautiful. At sight of him she cried a little and he said nothing.

"I'm crying because I'm so glad to see you," she told him. "It's terrible, Lionel, and I'm terribly sorry for poor Balmy. But the most terrible part is that I myself — I — oh, I'm a beast!"

"Rot! It's a blessed release. And we both know it, Hilda. For God's sake let's be honest with each other!" He made her drink some sherry and eat an omelet. Before he went she sobbed again a little and he took her in his arms and kissed her on the forehead. And he said: "Be brave, little woman."

Then he went to the inn to spend the night.

On the way out he had a word with the butler in the hall. Some of the older servants were hovering, for it was no time for discipline. For a minute or two he talked sympathetically to them all. He had the odd impression that they knew perfectly well that, necklace or no necklace, he had killed Hartways. They knew that he had been in love with their mistress and probably was still. They had tacitly sympathized with him over the appalling company that had been brought to the Manor. He had come down, disapproved — and then had happened the only solution to the Hartways tragedy.

Cornboise did not care. Everyone — with the possible exception of Hilda — might be morally certain that he had killed Hartways. But he knew now that he had made no slip. Already Stortford Mills station would have been combed. He knew, in fact, that the crime could never be brought home to him.

A few minutes after he had gone, the Scotland Yard men wanted Hilda again. Could she give them a detailed description of the necklace? She could do better than that — for Balmy had had an exact copy made in paste.

She gave them the paste copy and they insisted on giving her a receipt for it, though she protested she did not want to see it again, as she would never, in any circumstances, wear it. The Edwardian lady had a deep-rooted horror of imitation jewelry.

"Was it a valuable necklace, madam?"

"My husband paid 6000 guineas for it at Christie's. It used to belong to the Riverstoke family."

The paste necklace was sent on the next train to Scotland Yard. The detectives went over their facts. The only one of the house party who did not have a perfect alibi was Beeding, the jockey. It was known that he had fussed round Hartways, helped him on with his overcoat, followed the

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car on his motorcycle as far as the station, and had then "gone for a spin."

"Suppose he didn't go for a spin? Suppose he stopped by the hedge at the end of the station there and slipped between the signal box and so into the tunnel? Then what if he jumped and hooked himself up with that there starting-handle and — did the trick?"

Next day they put this theory to a practical test and came to the conclusion that, though just possible, it was too farfetched. Beeding had admitted that he had advised Hartways to carry a starting-handle for protection. This had been subsequently confirmed by Cornboise. The starting-handle, therefore, had nothing to do with the commission of the crime.

The inquest revealed no new facts. Hartways had been ingeniously murdered by a person unknown, the motive being the very valuable necklace.

The starting-handle and, six months later, the paste replica of the necklace drifted to the Department of Dead Ends.

Twelve months and one week after the death of Hartways the engagement was announced between his widow and Lionel Cornboise, who had now stepped into the baronetcy. They were married in April.

Hartways Manor and the house in Bruton street had been sold, but even so there was very little left of the Hartways estate. And Hilda had been staying with an aunt at Brighton.

The following autumn Hilda's father died and left to his daughter some £200 a year and, in effect, to his son-in-law his seat for the Borough. Cornboise resigned his commission, and a year later, in the Liberal landslide, managed to hold his seat by a tiny majority.

On his being returned to Parliament, Cornboise bought a house in Queen Anne's Gate. In the meantime Hilda had presented him with a red-headed replica of himself. Hilda became "one of our younger hostesses." The scandal and misery of her first marriage were officially forgotten.

But not for Hilda, for the memory added salt to her present happiness. Lionel did not quite understand this point of view, and would become strong and silent whenever she referred to Balmy.

They had been married over five years when she dropped a newspaper and asked him:

"Do you remember that horrid man Beeding? He was a jockey or something. He has got into the papers. They found him lying unconscious in a side street off Holborn. And there was a starting-handle lying beside him, but he had been stabbed. The police think it was a gang killing."

"The devil gets his own sometimes," grunted Lionel, and went off to the House of Commons.

While Beeding lay unconscious in a private room in St. Seiriols' Hospital, Superintendent Tarrant, of the Department of Dead Ends, offered the information that they had a

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starting-handle which had been one of the clues in the Hartways murder five years previously. Detective-Inspector Rason sent back a report with a polite denial that the starting-handle had ever been a clue to anything. It had long ago been decided that the presence of the starting-handle in the first-class compartment had no bearing on the crime.

As for the second starting-handle, when Beeding recovered consciousness he admitted it was his. He was, he said, carrying it from the garage to the agents' depot for repairs. He did not know who had attacked him, nor could he guess the object of the attack. He had not, he said, been robbed.

Now, in Beeding's pockets there had been found small change only. But the proprietors of the garage, a tumbledown stable, had handed Beeding a ten-pound note on behalf of a ready-money bookie and had seen Beeding put it in his pocket case — a few minutes before the attack.

Beeding stoutly denied this. Rason was puzzled, but Tarrant jumped on it.

There on his table were the two starting-handles. The first one had been carried, so the notes ran, because Hartways had feared attack. And Beeding had advised him to carry it for that purpose.

The second starting-handle did not seem to be in need of repair.

Beeding, then, believed in carrying a starting-handle as a weapon of defense, in case he might be attacked, when he was carrying something especially valuable. There was, Tarrant had to admit, no logical connection between the two crimes. But that did not matter in the least. He inquired from the doctor about Beeding's condition. The doctor described the nature of the wound, then:

"Officially, he is making good progress. He is quite clear-headed and feels no pain. He may be like that for a week, six months, a year. But if you want an official opinion I should think it extremely unlikely that he'll ever get out of that bed."

A week passed and Superintendent Tarrant, with a couple of clerks and a bag, went to have a chat with Beeding.

The conversation began by seeming to be directed to the question of Beeding's possible assailants, and Tarrant produced the starting-handle.

"This was your starting-handle, wasn't it, Mr. Beeding?"

Beeding had a good look at it. "No."

"Ever seen it before?"

"Not as far as I know."

"Ah! I've had that starting-handle for five years. It was the one that was found in the train when Hartways was murdered. And you've never seen it before?"

"Oh, I saw it at the time when your fellows were carting it round, I suppose. But why are you bringing all this up?"

"I just thought you might be inclined to make a yarn of it." The superintendent smiled. "I'm going to

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show you something else in a minute, Beeding. You were friendly with Hartways, weren't you? Let's see, what did they call him? — Balmy Hartways, wasn't it? Went to stay with him and taught him a few things about horses, didn't you, Beeding? Did you ever happen to see his missis wearing the — the Riverstoke necklace?"

"What are you getting at?"

"Nothing, Beeding. You don't have to tell me anything you'd rather keep quiet about. Never give evidence against yourself. Perhaps I'd better not ask any questions until you're out and about again. But maybe I've got a bit of good news for you and maybe I haven't. . . . What would you say if I told you we'd got the man who knifed you?"

"Tommyrot!" said Beeding so quickly that Tarrant became fairly sure of his ground.

"The man who knifed you and robbed you, Beeding."

Beeding stayed mum. Tarrant dived into the bag and dangled before Beeding's eyes the paste copy of the Riverstoke necklace. Beeding became profoundly excited.

"Cor! You've got him, and I know who it was. Chalky Saunders. He's been hanging round Polly and she gave him the tip, the dirty little slut. My God, I'll pay her for that when I get out!"

Superintendent Tarrant put the necklace away.

"When you get out. . . . When you get out, did you say, Beeding? You're reckoning on getting the sentence commuted, then?"

Beeding dropped his jaw and gazed at the wholly irrelevant starting-handle.

"I took the necklace from Balmy before he ever went on the train!" he cried. "While I was helping him on with his overcoat in the hall I picked his pocket."

"Kept it a long time, haven't you, Beeding?"

"Well, none of the fences would touch it when there was a murder tacked on. And just lately I had the chance of planting it on a new man — never mind who. I'd mentioned it to Polly and told her I was taking it up on the chance. Cor! . . . But I had nothing to do with the murder, Mr. Tarrant. That was done in the train, and how could I have got in the train?"

"Didn't happen to slip along to the tunnel and hook yourself up onto the hand-rail by means of this starting-handle, did you?"

"No. I swear I didn't. I tell you I took it off him ——"

"All right, Beeding. I believe you, and I daresay, if you get a good man, the jury will, too. But we can't promise to keep Polly out of it now you've mentioned her name."

Tarrant left Beeding a few minutes before twelve. By 1:30 the whole of the diamond trade, legitimate and otherwise, knew that the Riverstoke necklace was being hunted by the whole pack. By 3:15 it was brought to Scotland Yard by a terrified fence

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with a very weak explanation — which was accepted.

Lionel Cornboise had as yet no aspiration to cabinet rank. He had made one very military maiden speech and for the rest contented himself with a very zealous obedience to the Whips. He was told that he could go home for tea, and was there informed that Lady Cornboise was in the dining room with an official from Scotland Yard.

In those days Scotland Yard held no more secret terror for him than it holds for you and me. He supposed that Hilda had lost an umbrella and was therefore surprised to see two large diamond necklaces laid out on the dining room table.

"Lionel, isn't it splendid! They've found the Riverstoke necklace after all these years. And they're not allowed to tell me where they've found it. This other one's only the paste one. I was just going to sign a receipt when you came in. This is Mr. — er ——"

"Tarrant," supplied Tarrant, and smiled. Lionel made polite conversation while Hilda signed the receipt.

"I don't think I want any tea — I'd rather have a drink. Join me in a whisky-and-soda, Mr. Tarrant?"

"Thank you, Sir Lionel."

In those days, when men had a drink, women retired. Hilda retired with the necklaces.

"Funny your finding it after all these years! The long arm of the law and all that! I understand I'm not allowed to ask how it all happened."

"Well, Sir Lionel, one has to guard one's tongue with the ladies. Of course, there can't really be any secret about it, because we've got the man and Lady Cornboise will be a witness, I'm afraid. Did you ever hear of a man called Beeding?"

"Yes. A racing tout of some sort. Half a minute, though! If he — stole — the necklace ——"

"Quite so, Sir Lionel!" The superintendent, we may suppose, appeared to mellow under the influence of the whisky. "And I don't mind telling you I know just how it was done. You remember there was a starting-handle found in the carriage that seemed to have nothing to do with the murder. Now, Beeding had that handle under his coat when he was following Hartways' car on his motor bike. He rode on when the car stopped at the station — rode on a bit and hid his motor bike. Then he came back, cut through the hedge, slipped past the signal box, and hid himself in the tunnel until the 11:20 came along. He's a little man, but they're very wiry, those jockeys — oh, very wiry! You'd be surprised! When the 11:20 came along he made a jump for the train, using the starting-handle to shorten his jump — hooked it into the hand-rail. Then he shot Hartways with Hartways' own revolver, which he had stolen from the house, and there you are! He found the market a bit too hot for that necklace, especially since it was so well-known, being the Riverstoke necklace, and he had to hold it."

"H'm! Has he confessed?"

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"No. He put up a silly little tale about picking Mr. Hartways' pocket before they started off. But that's too easy. You know as well as I do, Sir Lionel, that Marshall Hall himself couldn't do anything with such a fool defense. We've got him — like that. And we'll hang him — you see if we don't.

"The part I don't like," continued the superintendent, "is the girl he's living with. Decent enough little thing called Polly. Funny how these fellows often get very nice women. As she was helping him hide the necklace we shall have to charge her as accessory to the murder. But, of course, they won't hang her — probably let her off with five years."

Lionel went upstairs and found Hilda.

"Oh, Lionel, isn't it splendid! You know, poor Balmy gave 6000 for it at Christie's. And it wasn't insured. So the money will be ours. . . . All right! I was going to say we'll sell it and make a trust for David."

"You always say 'poor Balmy' . . . Do you wish it had never happened, Hilda?"

"No." Then she echoed his own words from the past. "I think I'm being honest with myself about that, Lionel. It was a blessed release."

"I'm not sorry it happened either," he said.

He suddenly kissed her and said goodbye, but she just thought he was going back to the House of Commons.

A gentleman might conceivably commit murder if he were utterly and absolutely convinced that by so doing he insured an increase in the sum of human happiness. But a gentleman could in no circumstances allow another man, however intrinsically worthless, to pay the price of his own crime — to say nothing of allowing an innocent woman to go to prison for five years.

It was six o'clock when he reached Scotland Yard. But Superintendent Tarrant was still there. It was almost as if he were waiting for Sir Lionel Cornboise.

"I've come to tell you that you're barking up the wrong tree," he said, in that clipped military voice. "Beeding had nothing to do with the murder of Hartways. I killed him myself. I don't want to talk about it. Let me sit down here and I'll write a circumstantial confession."

That night Beeding died.

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Solution to

A STUDY IN WHITE

by NICHOLAS BLAKE

THE Inspector arrested the Guard for the wilful murder of Arthur J. Kilmington.

Kilmington's pocket had been picked by Inez Blake, when she pretended to faint at 8:25, and his gold watch was at once passed by her to her accomplice, Macdonald. Now Kilmington was constantly consulting his watch. It is inconceivable, if he was not killed till after 9 p.m., that he should not have missed the watch and made a scene. This point was clinched by the First-class passenger who had said that a man, answering to the description of Kilmington, had asked him the time at 8:50: if it had really been Kilmington, he would certainly, before inquiring the time of anyone else, have first tried to consult his own watch, found it gone, and reported the theft. The fact that Kilmington neither reported the loss to the Guard, nor returned to his original compartment to look for the watch, proves he must have been murdered *before he became aware of the loss* — i.e., shortly after he left the compartment at 8:27. But the Guard claimed to have spoken to Kilmington at 9 p.m. Therefore the Guard was lying. And why should he lie, except to create an alibi for himself? This is Clue Number One.

The Guard claimed to have talked with Kilmington at 9 p.m. Now, at 8:55 the blizzard had diminished to a light snowfall, which soon afterwards ceased. When Stansfield discovered the body, it was buried under snow. Therefore Kilmington must have been murdered *while the blizzard was still raging* — i.e., some time before 9 p.m. Therefore the Guard was lying when he said Kilmington was alive at 9 p.m. This is Clue Number Two.

Henry Stansfield, who was investigating on behalf of the Cosmopolitan Insurance Company the loss of the Countess of Axminster's emeralds, reconstructed the crime as follows:

Motive: The Guard's wife had been gravely ill before Christmas: then, just about the time of the train robbery, he had got her the best surgeon in Glasgow and put her in a nursing home (evidence of engine-driver: Clue Number Three). A Guard's pay does not usually run to such expensive treatment: it seemed likely, therefore, that the man, driven desperate by his wife's need, had agreed to take part in the robbery in return for a substantial bribe. What part did he play? During the investigation the Guard had stated that he had left his van for five minutes, while the train was climbing the last section of Shap

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Bank, and on his return found the mail-bags missing. But Kilmington, who was traveling on this train, had found the Guard's van locked at this point, and now (evidence of Mrs. Grant: Clue Number Four) declared his intention of reporting the Guard. The latter knew that Kilmington's report would contradict his own evidence and thus convict him of complicity in the crime, since he had locked the van for a few minutes to throw out the mail-bags himself, and pretended to Kilmington that he had been asleep (evidence of Kilmington himself) when the latter knocked at the door. So Kilmington had to be silenced.

Stansfield already had Percy Dukes under suspicion as the organizer of the robbery. During the journey Dukes gave himself away three times. First, although it had not been mentioned in the papers, he betrayed knowledge of the point on the line where the bags had been thrown out. Second, though the loss of the emeralds had been also kept out of the Press, Dukes knew it was an emerald *necklace* which had been stolen: Stansfield had laid a trap for him by calling it a bracelet, but later in conversation Dukes referred to the "necklace." Third, his great discomposure at the (false) statement by Stansfield that the emeralds were worth £25,000 was the reaction of a criminal who believes he has been badly gypped by the fence to whom he has sold them. Dukes was now planning a second train robbery, and meant to compel the Guard to act as accomplice again. Inez Blake's evidence (Clue Number Five) of hearing him say, "You're going to help us again, chum," etc., clearly pointed to the Guard's complicity in the previous robbery: it was almost certainly the Guard to whom she had heard Dukes say this, for only a railway servant would have known about the existence of a platelayers' hut up the line, and made an appointment to meet Dukes there; moreover, if Dukes had talked about his plans for the next robbery, on the train itself, to anyone *but* a railway servant suspicion would have been incurred should they have been seen talking together.

Method: At 8:27 Kilmington goes into the Guard's van. He threatens to report the Guard, though he is quite unaware of the dire consequences this would entail for the latter. The Guard, probably on the pretext of showing him the route to the village, gets Kilmington out of the train, walks him away from the lighted area, stuns him (the bruise was a light one and did not reveal itself in Stansfield's brief examination of the body), carries him to the spot where Stansfield found the body, packs mouth and nostrils tight with snow. Then, instead of leaving well alone, the Guard decides to create an alibi for himself. He takes his victim's hat, returns to train, puts on his own dark, off-duty overcoat, finds a solitary passenger asleep, masquerades as Kilmington inquiring the time,

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and strengthens the impression by saying he'd walk to the village if the relief engine did not turn up in five minutes, then returns to the body and throws down the hat beside it (Stansfield found the hat only lightly covered with snow, as compared with the body: Clue Number Six). Moreover, the passenger noticed that the inquirer was wearing blue trousers (Clue Number Seven). The Guard's regulation suit was blue; but Duke's suit was gray, and Macdonald's a loud check — therefore, the masquerader could not have been either of them.

The time is now 8:55. The Guard decides to reinforce his alibi by going to intercept the returning fireman. He takes a short cut from the body to the platelayers' hut. The track he now makes, compared with the beaten trail towards the village, is much more lightly filled in with snow when Stansfield finds it (Clue Number Eight): therefore, it must have been made some time after the murder, and could not incriminate Percy Dukes.

The Guard meets the fireman just after 8:55. They walk back to the train. The Guard is taken aside by Dukes, who hac gone out for his "airing," and the conversation overheard by Inez Blake takes place. The Guard tells Dukes he will meet him presently in the platelayers' hut: this is aimed to incriminate Dukes, should the murder by any chance be discovered, for Dukes would find it difficult to explain why he should have sat alone in a cold hut for half an hour just around the time when Kilmington was presumably murdered only one hundred and fifty yards away. The Guard now goes along to the engine and stays there chatting with the crew for some forty minutes. His alibi is thus established for the period from 8:55 to 9:40 p.m. His plan might well have succeeded, but for three unlucky factors he could not possibly have taken into account — Stansfield's presence on the train, the blizzard stopping soon after 9 p.m., and the theft of Arthur J. Kilmington's watch.

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